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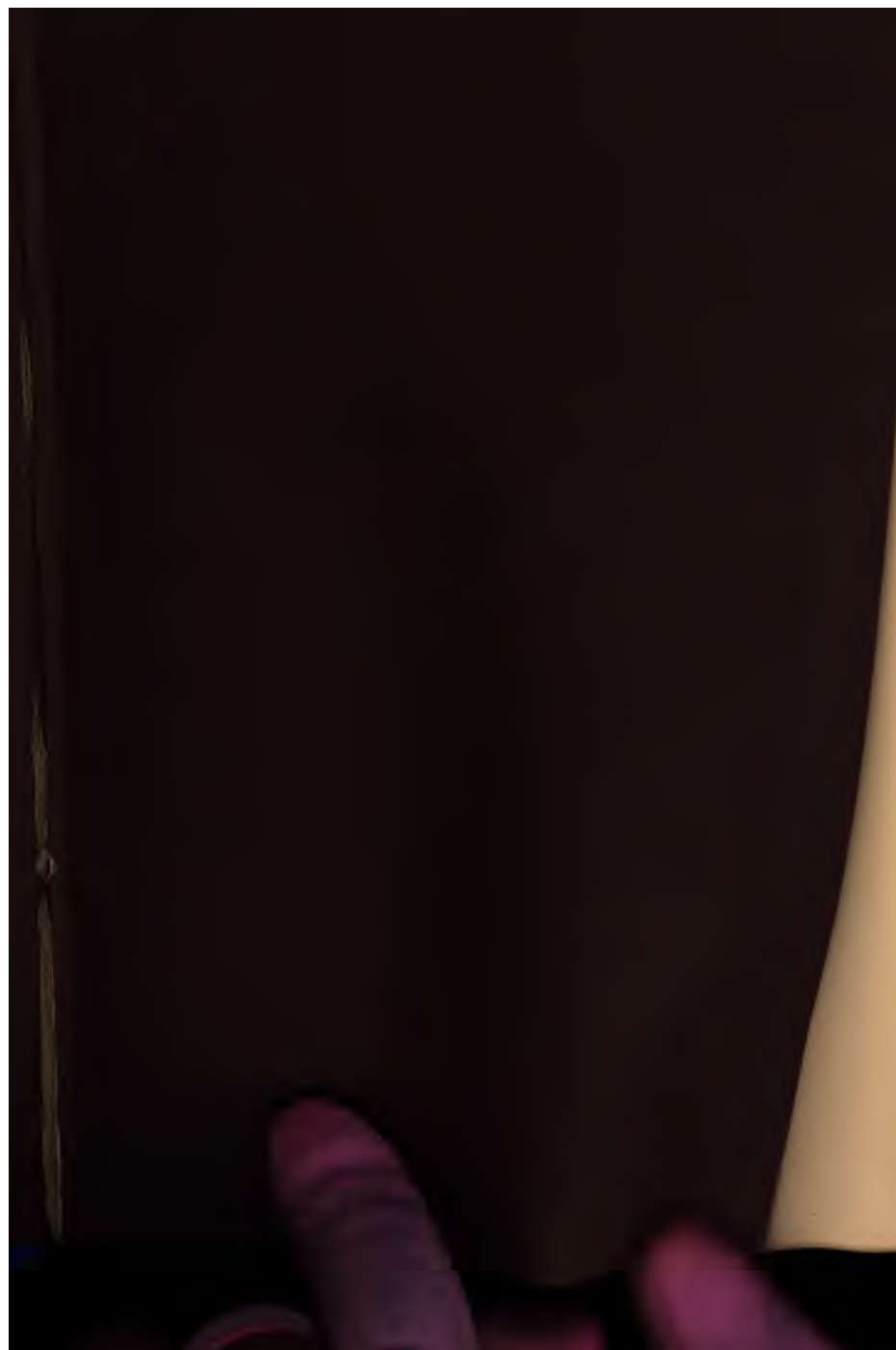
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"Arundel took water and threw it on her face."—*p.* 430.

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# THE HOUSE OF RABY;

*OR, OUR LADY OF DARKNESS.*

BY

MRS. GEORGE HOOPER,

AUTHOR OF "ARBELL," "A YOUNG MAN'S LOVE," ETC.

---

"Of love that never found his earthly close,  
What sequel?"

TENNISON'S "Love and Duty."

---

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PART I.  
INTRODUCTORY.



# THE HOUSE OF RABY;

OR,

## OUR LADY OF DARKNESS.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### MY HOME AND MY AUNT MARGARET.

MY home—my first home—my father's house, I have well-nigh forgotten; but how well I remember the first time I ever saw my Aunt Margaret! It is twenty years ago next May. I was then eight years old, or as we children used to say, "going on for my nine." My mother and Nurse Sarah deplored the delicacy of my constitution at that age; but my father said I should "grow strong enough in time, if they would not coddle me so much. The boy wants fresh air and exercise." And he would sometimes add, "We had better send him for a few months to his Aunt Margaret." This proposal was always answered by deprecating looks and words from my mother. She would draw me to her, on such occasions, and kiss me with extra motherly fervour, saying fondly,—

"Poor little Frank! No, no! Papa will not be so unkind! He will not send Frank to Aunt Margaret!"

Having been accustomed to this sort of thing ever since I was five years old, by the time I was eight the proposal of sending me to my aunt sounded like a tremendous threat. A strange, ill-defined terror was connected with the name of this unknown relative. I remember carefully avoiding to ask questions about her, in hopes that if I did not remind people of her she would be forgotten. And I never liked to have my little ailments mentioned before my father, lest he should talk of sending me to this awful *incognita*.

During the winter of my eighth year, I had measles, or some other childish complaint, and was considerably thinned and weakened by it. My mother became very anxious that I should have country air in the spring, and plans were discussed for sending me away from home. However, they all fell to the ground, because my mother would not let me go anywhere without her, and she herself would not leave home without my father, who was compelled to remain at North Ashurst to superintend some new factories, which no one knew how to manage in those days but himself. In vain my father represented the advantage of this and the other arrangement for establishing her and the children within a few hours' journey of the town; my mother was nervous and uncomfortable at the thought of going away from him. She was equally nervous and uncomfortable at the thought of sending me away from her—even though she sent Sarah, that most trustworthy of head-nurses, to keep watch and ward over me. None of these plans pleased her.

I was sitting on my mother's lap one day after dinner, when she and my father were talking of these things.

"And yet, love," said my mother, with more decision than usual in her tone, "the dear child *must* have change of air. What can we do with him, James?"

"Why not send him to Margaret for the spring and summer?" asked my father, suddenly.

"Ah, I wonder I never thought of that!" she exclaimed. "Nothing could be better. Carleton is famous for its bracing air and fine hilly situation. The family are sure not to be at the castle before September; so Margaret can have him very well. I shall write directly, and tell her we mean to send him."

"My dear," interrupted my father, "would it not be better to write first, and inquire whether she will be kind enough to take charge of a sickly child, who will necessarily give her much trouble?"

"Oh, there is no need to do that," replied mamma. "You know she has asked us, over and over again, to send down

one of the children to stay with her, and we have never sent any of them yet."

"But, Clara, my dear," remonstrated my father, whose sense of propriety was offended by something in my mother's tone, "I do not like the idea of making Margaret a mere convenience in this way, after having slighted all her kind invitations hitherto."

"Oh, don't trouble yourself about that, love!" said my mother, laughing. "You are over-scrupulous. I am sure Margaret will not mind being made a convenience of; she never did mind it when she was a girl, you know."

"Yes, I know, Clara; and I know also that we were not scrupulous enough, any of us, in minding it for her."

"Well, James, I should like to know of what use old maids are in the world, if one cannot make conveniences of them?"

My father did not seem inclined to reply, but looked rather grave for a minute, and then went out of the room. As soon as he was gone, I began to cry.

"What is my sweet pet crying for?" asked mamma, kissing my pale face, and taking me fondly in her arms.

"I don't want to go to Aunt Margaret, mamma?" I sobbed out.

"Not want to go to kind, good Aunt Margaret? Oh, Frank, Frank, why do you say so?"

"I don't know; but I don't like her."

"Why, you never saw her, child!"

"I don't care for that. I hate her."

"Do you know, Frank, it is very naughty and wicked to hate your papa's own sister?"

"Is she papa's sister, though?" asked I, stopping my sobs suddenly from surprise. "I did not know that."

"Yes, Frank, she is your papa's sister, and a kind lady who will be very good to you, and whom you must love." And mamma looked at me more gravely than usual. I was completely puzzled. I felt sure, from what I had so often heard her say before, whenever a visit to Aunt Margaret had



been talked of, that mamma did not really love her. I could not understand this sudden change of tone; for I had not then learned that interest or convenience often subdues one's liking or disliking, for a time. However, now that I clearly understood what the word *Aunt* meant, I felt that it was very wicked indeed to hate so near a relation; and my childish conscience was eager to throw off the sin.

"Oh, mamma! why did you not tell me before? You always used to say that Aunt Margaret was a cross old maid, and you would send me to her if I was a naughty boy. If you had told me that she was kind and good, mamma, I should never have thought of hating her. I'm sure I thought you hated her too, mamma."

"How you talk, my child! It is wicked to hate any one, my dear. *Of course* I like your aunt;—and you will be sure to like her when you go to Carleton Castle."

"What! does Aunt Margaret live in a castle—a real castle?"

"Yes, Frank. Such a fine, grand, beautiful castle!"

How my young imagination warmed at the idea! Then I was actually going to see, to live in *a castle*;—a castle, with a moat and a drawbridge, perhaps; and even dungeons! Of course it would be like the castles I had read of in story-books. I questioned mamma eagerly on these and many other points; but she had never been to Carleton, and knew nothing but that there were a village and a large park and a castle all called by that name; that the castle was old and large, and stood on a hill; and that from one of the towers five counties could be seen. All this sounded quite marvellous in my ears;—it seemed too good to be true. It did not occur to me to ask how Aunt Margaret came to live there; but I asked almost every other question on the subject, as I stood beside mamma, with wide-open eyes and flushed cheek. At length she began to fear I should work myself into a fever, and forbade my asking any more questions at that time. She carried me up to the nursery, and laid me down on my little bed, and felt my pulse anxiously. "May I say just one more thing, mamma? and then I will try to go to sleep, indeed."

"Well, just one, my darling; only speak in a whisper."

"How is it that Aunt Margaret lives in a castle? I thought only barons and their wives lived in castles. Now, Aunt Margaret is not a baron's wife, I know; for she is an old maid. The castle at Carleton is not her own, is it?"

"No, my darling. The castle belongs to Lord and Lady Carleton. But Aunt Margaret always lives there now, and takes care of everything. She is what is called the house-keeper."

"Oh, very well. Thank you, dear mamma," said I, putting my head down on the pillow;—then, starting up again, I put my arms round her neck, and said, "How soon shall I go to Carleton Castle? To-morrow do you think?"

"Oh dear no. Not to-morrow, nor the next day, nor the day after that." And seeing me greatly agitated, she added softly, "If you do not keep quiet, Frank, and go to sleep, you will be ill again, and then you will not be able to go to Carleton Castle at all." This sobered me effectually; and I lay down and remained quite still. I soon fell asleep, and dreamed a long, happy dream about being in a castle, and walking through galleries, and spacious chambers, and halls, and wandering in woods and gardens. And there was a kind, curiously-dressed old woman, with a high cap and a great bunch of keys at her side, who showed me many fine things,—*that* was Aunt Margaret, I thought. I liked her in my dream, and when I woke I wondered whether she would be like *that*. I rather hoped she would.

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## CHAPTER II.

### MY FIRST JOURNEY.

MOST children shrink from the thought of going from home for the first time. I did not, simply because my imagination was fully occupied with beautiful and glorious visions of the place I was going to. And when the evening before my departure for Carleton Castle arrived, I was in a state of eager

anticipation. This visit was to be the first occasion on which I should sleep away from home, and I could not calmly entertain the notion that on the following night I should go to bed in a castle, perhaps in a bed with hangings of old tapestry "more than a hundred years old!" That was my *ne plus ultra* of antiquity in those days.

I was more than usually quiet that last night at home; my curiosity about the things of the morrow was so intense. My mother and Sarah supposed I was melancholy at the thought of leaving home, and tried to console me with the information that I should not stay away very long. I said nothing, but went on dreaming about the place I was going to. I can't say I had any strong regret about leaving home, or mamma, or my nurse and playmates—I believed that I should return to them very soon.

It was on a fine morning, early in the month of May, that my father took me on this my first visit. I was dressed and had eaten my bread and milk by six o'clock in the morning; and, though I wanted very much to run up and down stairs, and talk to papa and mamma, and see the boxes in the hall, and look out for the coach which was to call for us at seven, yet Sarah would make me lie down again; for, she said, I was "going to travel more than a hundred miles, and should be *dead tired*" before the end of the day. A hundred miles seemed to me, then, a more than world-wide distance—more than

"From the centre thrice to the utmost pole;"

and I lay passively musing upon such immensity, till mamma came to take me down stairs. In a few minutes the stage coach with four horses drove briskly up to our door. I was delighted beyond measure, and in a great hurry to bid everybody "good-bye," and get up to the top of the coach. I remember mamma said, with tears in her eyes,—

"Oh, Frank, my darling, I do really believe you are not at all sorry at going away from your own mother!"

"Oh, mamma, mamma, don't say so now, or I shall begin to cry. It makes me so miserable to hear you speak such

things. I love you very much,—indeed I do,—but—but—— Oh, I say! Look there, mamma! He's going to blow the horn, I do believe. I wish you were going too, mamma."

"Now then, young master, up with you," said the guard, snatching me from the ground. My mother, however, would kiss me once more, and as I saw that her tears were streaming fast, I also began to cry; but I tried very hard to conceal the fact. When I was fairly seated on the top of the coach, and looked down for mamma, she was no longer to be seen, but I guessed that she was standing inside the hall, so I bawled out, "Don't cry, mamma!" She came back to the door at the sound of my voice, and nodded and smiled through her tears. Then I lost sight of papa and mamma both for a minute; after which papa came out briskly, and climbed up to his place beside me. The guard called out, "All right!" the coachman touched the leaders gently with the whip, the coach dashed off along the road; my father's arm was round me, and he pressed me to him affectionately.

"Now, my boy, here we are, going off to Carleton Castle. You are to get quite well there, you know, and come home a strong little man to mamma."

I could make no answer, for I was busily engaged in swallowing my tears. I was ashamed to be seen crying; it was "just like a girl," my brother Tom would have said. He never cried when he went to school.

At length I was able to ask questions about the places we were going through; and my heart had already shaken off its sorrow by the time the coach stopped for breakfast, at ten o'clock.

I shall not enter into the particulars of this my first journey, although I remember every circumstance connected with it, and could give fac-similes of the persons of all the outside passengers, and a fair report of their conversation. It was five o'clock in the evening when we stopped at the town of P—. I was lifted down, very tired and sleepy. The coachman was paid; the coach changed horses and then drove away. We went into the inn, and I heard my father order

"Some refreshments directly, and a post-chaise, in half an hour on to Carleton."

I was too tired to ask any questions then, and fell asleep while my father was eating, after he had in vain tried to persuade me to eat. When I woke up again, I found myself inside a carriage, with my father's arm supporting me, and my head on his breast. The carriage had windows in front, and I could see a man in a dirty light-blue jacket, riding on one of the horses. Then I knew we were in the post-chaise, and on our way to Carleton Castle. This thought woke me effectually; and I began to sit up, and talk, and look out of the window. At last we came to the village of Carleton. It seemed to me the prettiest place in the world. The cottages were thatched, and most of them were very neat, with well-stocked little gardens; and the church was all overgrown with ivy. After driving through the village, the road began to ascend, and we went on more slowly.

"Papa," said I, "why do people call Aunt Margaret an old maid? What is an old maid?"

"A lady who has never been married."

"Then is Lucy an old maid?" (Lucy was my sister, aged twelve, then at school.)

"Lucy is not an old maid yet, my boy; she is a young one; but she may be an old maid."

"I hope she will *not*!" said I, vehemently. "I do not like old maids. Sarah says they are always ill-tempered and selfish."

"Sarah is mistaken, Frank. One of the best-tempered and least selfish persons I know is an old maid; and that is the lady who is going to take care of you, and make you happy—your Aunt Margaret."

"I wish she were not an old maid, though," I exclaimed, after a pause, during which I had tried to divest my mind of all the common-places I had been accustomed to hear about the class. "Why does she not have a husband, like mamma, and Mrs. Collins, and Mrs. Forbes? Could she not get one if she were to try?"

My father smiled, and said he did not know exactly; but we were to be sure and ask her. "In the meantime, my boy," continued he, "take my word for it, old maids are not all ugly and cross and selfish, as Sarah says. I am afraid she must have been unfortunate in her acquaintance with old maids. By the way, Frank, it is better to say '*unmarried ladies*;' it is not considered respectful or polite to call a lady *an old maid*. No gentleman, you know, is ever disrespectful to ladies, or to any one, indeed; least of all to those who are unprotected in the world."

"Unprotected! I do not understand, papa. I thought Aunt Margaret was grown up; quite an old woman, indeed. Do grown-up people want to be protected ever?"

"Yes, my dear; very often. But we will wait till you are a little older before I try to explain to you that grown-up women sometimes want protectors as much as little boys and girls. Look there! That is the great gate of Carleton Park. See! that is the castle a long way down the avenue." I strained my eyes, but I could only distinguish a large building in the distance.

"Are we going in at that beautiful gate, papa?" cried I, lost in wonder at the griffins that seemed to be playing with a golden ball at the top of the great stone gateway. At this moment the chaise stopped, and the post-boy called out, "Hoy! hoy! hulloh!" A woman came out from the lodge, and to my father's request that she would open the gate, replied in what seemed to me a foreign language. But my father understood it, and said to the postboy, "Very well, then. Drive on to the middle gate." We drove on for another half mile, and then entered the park by the middle gate, which had no lodge, and was always kept unlocked for the convenience of the villagers who had communication with the castle. This gate led into a drive cut through a wood. It was May; the birds were singing their evensong; the setting sun cast a yellow light over the surface of the ground under the trees, just freshly decked with young leaves, bright as those of Paradise. I had never seen a wood in spring-time before, and

was amazed by the beauty around me. My father was delighted with my delight, after the manner of parents.

"Look, look, papa! Thousands and thousands of blue flowers! Oh, hyacinths are they? How very pretty they are! Oh, and there are primroses—such heaps and heaps! May I get out? Oh, *do* let us, papa! I never saw such green trees. They all look as if God had made them fresh to-day! Oh, what is that thing, there?—Brown, with bright eyes, running up that tree? What, is that a real, right-down, wild squirrel? Oh, oh! See how he is peeping down! Oh, papa, papa! what a beautiful place! I never thought Carleton was anything like this."

And I threw myself into my father's arms in a transport of pleasure, so pure, so vivid, that it was the fitting inauguration of my life in that place.

It was nearly dark when we drove into a paved courtyard. I had been too much excited to watch for our approach to the castle itself. When I heard the noise of the chaise on the stones, I jumped up from my father's embrace, and stretched my head out of the window. But I quickly drew it back again, and put my hand into my father's.

"Well, my boy, what is the matter?" he asked, soothingly.

"Oh, nothing, papa," I replied.

The postboy got down and opened the chaise-door. We alighted, and I looked around me, still holding tight by my father's hand. The evening shades were fast covering the place. The large deserted court, that echoed the slightest footfall, was at that hour gloomy enough to strike terror into the heart of a child, even in robust health; for me, sickly, weary with excitement, and faint with hunger as I was, it had an indescribable horror. Though I knew that the great blackness which reared itself all around me was a castle, I dared not look at it a second time. The one glimpse I had caught when I put my head out of the chaise inspired me with a strange fancy. I recollect it well. The place looked to me like two things which were especially frightful to me. It was like a picture of the Castle of Udolpho, which Sarah

never liked me to look at, and it was like our county gaol, which I had once seen—gazing at it in mute horror while Sarah told me about the wicked murderers and thieves who were shut up there till they were taken out to be hanged. —And this was my first feeling on seeing Carleton Castle. I dared not look up, lest I should see it again; fear fastened my young feet to the earth. My father tried to lead me; I clung to his hand with a convulsive clasp. Something in my throat prevented my screaming; a cold shudder ran through me, and I sank down on the pavement insensible.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was half conscious again; but my eyelids seemed too heavy to lift. I felt a soft, warm air around me, and there was a smell like that of my mother's dressing-room. It was *eau de cologne*, I knew. Was I back again at home? I moved my eyes a little—No! That little showed me that the sofa on which I lay was red—mamma's sofa was blue. Then I heard some one say:

"He is recovering, poor child!"

"Ah! whose voice is that?" I asked mentally: but I was too exhausted to look up.

"Frank! What, my little Frank!"

This time it was my father spoke. I felt his face close to mine, and I made a feeble effort to kiss him.

"That's right, my darling!" he said tenderly. "So you are quite knocked up with your long journey, and want something to eat. Come, see what your Aunt Margaret has got for you."

"Aunt Margaret," I murmured "Is she here?" But I did not move my head from my father's shoulder. Even the pleasure of a first look at this long-talked-of relative could not rouse me. I felt a spoon at my lips, and mechanically swallowed its contents. Then came a second and a third. At length my eyes opened, and the first thing I saw was a lady kneeling beside the sofa where I lay. She held a silver cup, from which she was feeding me. This was my Aunt Margaret.

I do not know how to convey to the reader's mind a



correct idea of my aunt, Margaret Hastings ;—Miss Hastings of the Castle, as she was called by everybody of high and low degree in and about Carleton. If I were to say that her features were not regular, but that she *had the power of being* more beautiful than any regular accredited beauty that I ever saw, you would think I talked nonsense ; and yet, after much thought on the subject, that is the nearest approach that I can make to a correct expression of my meaning.

I suppose I was not less greedy than most little boys—but certain it is that my attention was not at all attracted by the pretty cup and its delicious contents ; perhaps I was too fatigued ; or the nervous system of my little body was too excited for the stomach to perform its proper work and crave food eagerly after a long fast. My mental faculties, however, must have been more than usually active, for the impression they received on that first sight of my aunt will never be effaced. How clearly does my memory recall every minute circumstance of that, the most remarkable evening in my childish existence !

As she knelt before me, her eyes on a level with mine, I looked straight into them, with the eager curiosity of a child. How long I looked I do not know ; but there seemed to be a long pause, during which we neither of us moved an eyelash. I saw tears gathering in those clear brown eyes of hers ; and darting forward from my father's knee, utterly regardless of the nice compound in that beautiful cup, I threw my little arms round Aunt Margaret's neck, and clasped her tight.

"Why, Margaret," said my father, laughingly, after a few minutes, "this is a clear case of love at first sight !" He then added, more gravely, "I had no idea the boy had *this* in him. This over-susceptibility is quite new to me. I never suspected anything of the kind. How will he bear contact with the world ? I must look to *you* for help here, Margaret."

"God will care for His own ; He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," replied my aunt ; and she pressed a long kiss on my forehead. I opened my eyes once more.

"Can Frank stand now?" she asked gently. I tried to rise immediately, for I felt that she *wished* me to do so; and, at that moment, it would not have been possible for me to resist her will. Perhaps this was the effect of animal magnetism, perhaps it was merely the force of childlike obedience.

We both stood up, and I still held by my aunt's hand.

"He had better go to bed directly, I suppose," said my father.

"Oh, no, no, no!" I exclaimed passionately, clinging to my aunt, in mingled dread of the anticipated old tapestried bed, and the fear of losing sight of this suddenly loved relation.

"No," she said; "he is over-excited now, and had better remain with us till he is calmer. He shall lie here while we take tea." And suiting the action to the word, she lifted me to the sofa again. "There, that is better than going to bed all by oneself. Is it not, Frank?" And she settled me comfortably, in a sitting posture, among the soft pillows, so that I might amuse myself by seeing all that went on in the room. Then she sat down beside me, and said, "You are to sleep in my bedroom to-night; and you shall not go to bed till I go." I suppose my face expressed the great relief this information was to my mind; for my aunt laughed, and said, "Ah, you see, Frank, I know everything than is in little boys' minds. Now sit still, darling, and you shall have some nice tea; though you did throw over all the egg-wine, and spoil my best silk gown. Look at this, Master Frank!" And she held out the skirt of her gown, which had been deluged with the contents of the pretty silver cup.

I was now getting quite myself again, and enjoyed the tea and the sandwiches, and listening to the conversation upon all sorts of family matters which took place between my father and his sister. But when they began to talk of persons with whom I was unacquainted, I did not listen any longer, but amused myself with examining the room in which we were.

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## CHAPTER III.

## AUNT MARGARET'S PARLOUR.

THE room was spacious and nobly proportioned. It was so lofty, that by the light of the lamp I could not clearly distinguish the carvings on the ceiling and cornices. The floor as well as the walls and ceiling was of polished dark oak. Nearly the whole of the side of the room opposite to me seemed to be covered with crimson drapery. It was in reality a large bay-window before which the curtains were drawn. Facing this window, and behind the sofa on which I lay, was the door; before it an Indian screen was unfolded. On one side was the great fireplace, with its high chimney-piece of carved white marble—a wonderful piece of sculpture which I was never tired of admiring in after-years. On either side of the fireplace was an arched recess filled with bookcases. Opposite the fireplace I observed what seemed like a very deep recess, but I could not see very well, because a curtain was drawn half-way across it. The only thing which I could see inside it was the edge of a gilded picture-frame gleaming near the opening. The furniture of this room was of a kind I had never seen before. It has since become very fashionable; and may be met with now in very inappropriate places—in modern papered drawing-rooms and silken boudoirs. In my aunt's parlour, the high-backed chairs, massy tables, and elaborately-carved cabinets of black oak, were in accordance with the room itself. Stately and picturesque as was the aspect of this room, it had also an air of comfort and quiet, such as one seldom sees, except in cosy little rooms. It was a proper lady's bower, but Lady Carleton would as soon have thought of tearing down the tapestry in the banqueting-hall as of turning Miss Hastings out of the oak-parlour; although she was once heard to tell a royal duke who was on a visit at Carleton, that "the housekeeper's room was the most comfortable, the most complete thing in the castle;" and that "the state-rooms were common-place and tawdry compared

with it." Much as her ladyship admired this room, there were reasons why Miss Hastings retained it.

In this oak-parlour my aunt passed all the best years of her life; and the oak-parlour was certainly sympathetic, and gave her back in its quiet beauty and cheerful aspect the benefits she had shed upon all around her. There was no accumulation of ornamental rubbish; there was plenty of space to move about in; the handsomest articles of furniture were useful, and those of the commonest utility, footstools, corner-cupboards, writing and work-tables, etc., were remarkable for their beauty in that particular style of artistic upholstery which was the fashion among our great-great-grandfathers.

I lay, quiet enough, examining everything I could see with curious eyes; now, lost in admiration of the cherubs springing from the corners of a carved cabinet; and anon, endeavouring to make out the scene depicted on a china vase surmounting the said cabinet. At last, the beautiful marble carvings of the mantelpiece, displayed in strong relief as they were by the brightly blazing wood fire, riveted my attention. Those fierce-looking animals standing on their hind legs, each holding a great ball between its fore-paws, were griffins, I knew; for they were just like those I had seen on the gate. I thought I should very much like to see a real live griffin; and was wondering what country they came from, and whether there was any chance of my seeing one in a *menagerie*, where I had seen a lion and an ostrich, among other strange beasts, last year; when my infant musings were disturbed by a movement at the tea-table. I had not heard the previous conversation, which had lasted long, and had been carried on in a low familiar voice, for, at least, an hour after the meal was finished. Now, my aunt and my father were talking louder, and with animation; they had evidently forgotten me for the moment, and were deep in the luxury of recalling past pleasures. They both stood up, and my father grasped the pedestal of the lamp, saying, "I have heard nothing of *Per-golese* for ten years!—Where shall I carry this?"

"To the oratory," replied Aunt Margaret, stepping lightly

across the room towards the great recess which I mentioned before. My father, holding the lamp, followed with slow and hesitating steps.

"Ah, you do not feel at ease on my slippery floor, I see!" said my aunt, turning to watch him with an affectionate smile.

"What are they going to do?" thought I. In another moment my aunt drew back the beautiful curtain, and I saw what was in the recess.

It had been in former days an oratory, and was lighted in the daytime by a curious oval-shaped window, or *œil-de-bœuf*, of richly-coloured glass. This window was placed high up in the wall, so as to cast its light down upon the front of a beautiful chamber-organ, and a few other articles. During the daytime, the effect of the gorgeous colours, cast like a shattered rainbow all over that recess, was singularly beautiful. On seeing it for the first time, you would be impressed by a sense of mystery and dim magnificence. No painter could succeed in giving a faithful representation of that paradise of colouring; nor do I think it would look well in a picture ever so faithfully executed. I have tried many times to get something like the subdued richness, the intense yet thin and delicate hues of the shifting light, the dusky depth of shadow in the corners, and the vivid spots which at certain times lay like great carbuncles, emeralds, sapphires, and amethysts, upon the white keys of the organ, or the dark-gleaming floor.

On this first night, I saw no varied hues; but I felt a great admiration for that beautiful recess, even then. My father placed the lamp on a small table, and while my aunt selected a music-book from a stand and prepared to sing, I rose gently, and crept after them, to see better what was to be seen. The picture on the wall seemed to be a picture of that very organ, with a beautiful lady playing on it, while a group of angels were coming down from the sky to listen. It was a St. Cecilia by Correggio. There were two music-stands and a violin-case in one corner; a guitar and a harp-lute were on an old harpsichord; and these, with a small table and one or two seats, were all that could be seen, beside the picture and the

organ. But there was something that could *not* be seen, that attracted my attention irresistibly. The back of the organ did not touch the wall; there seemed a wide space behind it. What was to be seen there? I was about to run forward to look, when the sounds of the organ fixed me to the spot. I sat down gently on the folds of the long curtain, and grasped a portion of it, while I listened in rapture to the symphony; and then to my aunt's voice, as it gave forth with solemn sweetness the "*Sanctum et terribile*" of a mass by Pergolese. The end of that music I did not hear; for my overwrought spirit sank beneath its fatigues. I was found some time afterwards, fast asleep, and was carried to bed, where I slept many, many hours; a dreamless, refreshing sleep;—heedless alike of my absence from my own home, the vastness of Carleton Castle, or the wonders of my Aunt Margaret's parlour.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A WEEK OF WONDER.

WHEN I awoke the sun was high in the sky, and pouring a very flood of radiance through a large window opposite my bed. I started up, and tried to recollect where I was. The room was much larger and more handsomely furnished than any chambers I had been accustomed to see. It had an air of grandeur which, though strange, was by no means unpleasant to me. Yes, *This* was certainly rather like my idea of a bed-chamber in a castle. But, still, I should have thought this had been the "lady's chamber" and not the housekeeper's. Again, when I recollected that this housekeeper was the sweet lady I had seen last night,—my aunt—my father's sister,—it appeared quite proper that she should sleep in so beautiful a room; in that great, carved bedstead with the blue silk drapery, which she had evidently occupied last night; that she should dress herself before that magnificent toilette, that she should sit in that throne-like chair,

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and be looked down upon by those beautiful ladies and stately gentlemen whose pictures hung on the walls. I felt that my new-found relative was fitly lodged. But if this were the housekeeper's room, what must be the splendour of my Lady Carleton's? Perhaps it would be as beautiful as some of the apartments described in the Arabian Tales, where cedar and precious stones, carved ivory and beaten gold, form the chief materials for the builder and upholsterer!

I remember even now the intense admiration with which I looked upon everything I could see as I lay in bed, leaning on one elbow, with my little head on my hand. Considering what my parents were, I could not have been imbued with a vulgar taste for mere show; it was not the fine furniture and the spacious apartment only that struck me at the moment; it was the traditionary associations that moved me; the vision of power, wealth, and high rank which they called up. I did not know the value of what I saw, in a commercial or fashionable point of view; to me it was, even at that early age, worth argosies of historical and artistic treasure; value unknown in the auctioneer's account-books.

The pictures on the walls attracted me more than anything else. There were none of any antiquity. All were "counterfeit presentments" of living or recently deceased members of the Carleton family. Of these, two riveted my attention. They were full-length portraits of young men. They were evidently brothers, and from the similarity of age and appearance they would generally be taken for twins; as, indeed, they were. Their age seemed to be about twenty; both were handsome—with a strong likeness, and yet a strange unlikeness in the two faces. One had a gay and smiling aspect; the other looked sad, and a little fierce or wild. The latter frightened me at a first glance, and charmed me at the second. Child as I was, there was something in that lightning and cloud countenance which drew my eyes away from the happy face beside it. I sat upright to look at it better. Presently I fancied the large eyes gave out a kind glance at me. I looked and looked—and the more I looked the more I

was pleased with that beautiful, mournful face—with the strange light in the eyes. When my aunt came to tell me to get up, she found me standing in my night-gown before this picture—shading my eyes with my hands, and my little figure drawn to its full height that I might examine it the better. When I felt her hand on my shoulder I looked up at her and asked, almost in a whisper, as if awe-stricken,—

“Who is that, aunt?”

“Mr.-Arundel Raby.”

“I thought it was a lord, aunt! He looks so noble! Do not all lords look like that?”

“Oh dear no!” She said it with a little laugh. Then she stooped down and kissed me, and raising me in her arms, held me up to look at the picture.

“So you like this gentleman, do you, Frank?”

“Oh yes, aunt. Is he alive now? Shall I ever see him?”

“He is alive; but I do not think you will ever see him. He is very ill. Look at this other gentleman. It is his brother—the Earl of Carleton; the owner of the castle and all this beautiful park.” (And she pointed to the wide sunny landscape through the window.)

“I like *his* face, too. He looks so happy. I suppose it makes him happy to be Earl of Carleton, and to have such heaps and heaps of fine things for his own. I suppose he gives half of everything to his brother. I should.”

“Mr. Raby does not want any of these things. Besides, he has a castle of his own; and North Ashurst belongs to him.”

“What, North Ashurst, where we live—where papa’s factories and the coal-pits are?”

“Yes, my dear.”

“Then he is very rich. Why does he not look happy?”

“He is ill.”

“He would be happy, though, if he were well?—as happy as his brother?” I asked.

“It does not make people happy to be very rich and to be lords, my dear boy,” said my aunt, looking from me to the portrait.



"But he looks good, aunt. Mamma says good people are always happy."

"Mamma is mistaken, Frank. Mr. Raby is a good man, but he is not happy. Now, make haste and dress yourself."

The journey down stairs to breakfast gave me a glimpse of vast fields of enjoyment for days and weeks to come. We passed along a corridor hung with old, dim pictures. Many doors led into this corridor. Some were open, and showed portions of strange rooms; and here and there a narrow, winding staircase, leading up or down. When we arrived at the end, there was another corridor communicating with it, at a right angle, having a painted window at the other extremity. This corridor was entered by an arch, having crimson curtains looped up on each side. In the recess of a window at our right hand, which commanded the full view of this second gallery, sat a thin, grey-haired man, eating his breakfast at a little table, and reading a book. He seemed very comfortable. As soon as he heard us, which was not till we were close upon him, for the galleries were covered with soft matting, and we had not spoken, he rose, laid down his book, and walked before us a few steps to throw open a large door. My aunt said a few words to him in a language I did not understand; which he answered in a respectful tone, and with a profound bow. I was very curious to know what they said. I held my aunt's hands and looked up at him. He was very grave, and did not look at me. We passed through the door, which the grave man shut behind us; and I thought I heard him turn the key on the other side. But I forgot the circumstance in a moment, for my attention was attracted by what was before my eyes. We were in a spacious landing overlooking the great hall. Two flights of marble steps swept up from opposite sides of the hall, and met at this landing-place. My aunt ran lightly down one of these flights of steps, saying, "Make haste, my dear; we have kept papa waiting for breakfast." I wondered at the easy way she moved about in that grand hall; and thought I never should get courage to run up those stairs, two steps at a time, as I used to do at home.

She turned into a passage leading from the hall, and in a few minutes we were in a cheerful room, which I recognised as my aunt's parlour. It looked very different by daylight, when the warm sun was illuminating the oak-walls, and the window displayed that glorious prospect which has since become so familiar to my eyes and so dear to my heart. In all the fine parks of this lovely land of ours, I do not believe that there is a fairer, richer, and more extensive view than the one to be seen from the terrace outside that window, on the cushioned seat of which I lounged away more days of youth than I care to count. I have seen many sweeps of wood and groups of trees—many gently-swelling hills and dark-tinted hollows—many a smooth silver lake, with its bright nourishing stream—but none that, in all fortunate circumstances of natural arrangement, could compete with those that filled my little heart with gladness as I saw them in the sunlight on that first morning at Carleton.

"Well, Frank, my boy! down at last! I began to fear that you had lost yourself somewhere in this big house. So you are quite well again this morning, I see; and look as if you would like to be scampering away among the trees yonder. Well, well; come and have some breakfast first; and then I dare say your aunt will allow you to have a run." And my father lifted me up and kissed me tenderly.

I remained silent. Too many new ideas were crowding on my mind at once; the time to communicate my impressions and to ask questions had not yet arrived. I was silent as I kissed my father, and took my seat at the table. My eyes wandered round the room, eagerly inspecting the objects which had so excited my imagination the previous evening. I scarcely heard what my father and my aunt were talking about, and as they did not seem to heed me, I pursued my investigations undisturbed. I felt as if I should not have time enough in the two months I was to stay with my aunt to become familiar with all the wonders, beautiful and grotesque, which filled this single apartment; and as to being able to see everything, or half the things, in the castle, *that* seemed as

hopeless as my infant desire to read all the books in my father's library. The walk from my bedroom that morning had given me the terrible idea that I might easily lose myself in so vast a place, with so many rooms, and staircases, and galleries, and that I might never be found any more, at least not until I was a skeleton. Suddenly I recollected the man who had opened the door at the end of the corridor upstairs. Yes! *that* must be what he was there for; and I supposed there must be other men stationed in various parts of the huge edifice for the same purpose. I would ask.

"Aunt Margaret."

"Well, my dear;" and the beautiful, kind eyes turned on me.

"Is the man that opened the door for us kept there to prevent people from losing themselves in the castle?"

"No, my dear." And the kind eyes turned away.

My father laughed, and patted my head. "I dare say you think there ought to be half a dozen men, at least, placed in different parts, to prevent little boys from being lost here. I should not be surprised if there are. You need not fear, Frank. There will be plenty of people to direct you home to your aunt's room if you should miss the way. So don't be afraid of going about, and looking at everything. You may go now, if you like. And tell me, when I see you again, whether you don't think there are some capital nooks and corners to play at hide-and-seek in."

"Stop a moment!" said my aunt. "He must get a little accustomed to the place before he will like to go about by himself. Susan is very good-natured; and he can go about the house with her, till we are ready to walk." The bell was rung, and Susan appeared.

"Susan, I want you to take Master Frank with you for an hour. You can show him the library and the banqueting-room, before you go up to my room."

Susan seemed pleased, and took my hand. I liked the look of her; and we left the room together. As soon as the heavy door was closed, which effectually shut out sounds, Susan

showed the liveliness of her character by catching me up in her arms, and running along one or two passages, humming the tune of "The Campbells are coming," till she arrived in the great hall, where she seated me on a huge table, and burst into a merry laugh. It was so contagious, that I burst out laughing too; when the laugh subsided, Susan stroked my hair and kissed me, and then I kissed her; upon which she said, "Bless its little heart!" and kissed me again.

"Come, come! none of that shocking waste, if you please, my lady!" said a cheerful voice—a man's voice—somewhere about in the hall; but being unused to the place, I did not detect the exact spot from whence it came, till I followed the direction of Susan's laughing eye, as she said, "Go along with you, Mr. Joyce! I declare you are always to be found just when you are not wanted!"

Mr. Joyce was a tall, sprightly-looking young man, who appeared to be engaged in arranging some plants on a large stand near the great door, leading into the courtyard. He did not seem to be particularly anxious to finish his work, for he came forward to the table on which I was seated, with my arm round Susan's neck.

"Don't say I'm not wanted, Susan. You know you want me to come and look at this newest specimen of the human plant."

"Lord! Joyce! don't begin and call the child names. He ain't a plant, nor a specimen. He's a boy—a very nice little boy; and I'm very fond on him."

"Yes, I see you are. You made it plain enough just now, on purpose to provoke me, I suppose. Well, considering he's such a little tender slip,"—and he patted my cheek kindly,—*"I'll forgive you. And, now, tell us, who is he? No relation of our family, surely?—Yet—eh?"*—looking at me again, and very intently—"he's got a strange look of—"

"Hush!" said Susan, in a whisper, and glancing up towards the landing-place above, at the end of the hall—"mind what you say.—I saw it last night.—It gave me quite a turn! It's very odd.—But it *can't* be *really*.—Ah! what would the earl

give for such a boy!—To think of the title and everything going to strangers for want of an heir!—As if girls were nobodies, forsooth! I wish I could turn this boy into a Baby!—But his name is Hastings.”

“*That’s* very likely!” said Joyce, with a knowing look.

“For shame! You’re quite wrong there, any way,” said Susan, tossing her head indignantly, and turning scarlet. You shan’t say such things of my mistress! That comes of the nasty backbiting tongues you listened to in London. I’m ashamed of you!”

“Well, Susan, don’t get into a passion.”

“It does put me in a passion to hear Miss Hastings spoken of in that way. You don’t know her. She’s as good a lady as any of the family. Ask my lord and my lady what they would have done without her. Why, if it hadn’t been for her——”

“Hush! Look at the child!” said Joyce, directing her attention to my eager face.

Susan started as she looked at me, and said, “Lord, bless the child!”

“You don’t mean to tell me there’s nothing in that likeness?” said Joyce, in a whisper. “Why he’s as like the family as a cutting is to the old plant. Don’t tell me. I shall let our people in London know all about it.”

“But I *do* tell you. Why, his own father’s here now. He’s my mistress’s brother. If you go and spread any such abominable lies about,—if you so much as ever mention it again to any one but me,—I take my Bible oath, William Joyce, I’ll never keep company with you any more.” And Susan looked as if she meant what she said.

Joyce was confounded at her vehemence for a moment; but, recovering himself, he said, in a subdued tone, “Why, Susan, I didn’t mean any offence to you,—far from it. I spoke in a joke. Of course, I won’t speak of it again if you think there’s nothing in it. Come, kiss and be friends.”

“For being friends—well and good! I ain’t at enmity with you; but I’m not going to kiss you for one while, after

that. You're too foal-mouthed. Get rid of the London dirt, William. It don't improve you." And Susan snatched me from the table, and marched off, leaving Joyce looking after us rather foolishly.

"Are you my aunt's servant, or are you Lady Carleton's?" I asked of Susan, as we went away.

"I am your aunt's servant, Master Frank."

"Do you love my aunt, Susan?"

"Well, then, that I do. And it would be a shame if I didn't; for she saved my father from ruin, years ago, and she's always been good to me."

"Joyce, the man we saw just now,—he does not like my aunt, does he?"

"He don't know her yet. He's only lately come here. When he knows her he will be sure to like her. Everybody, almost, likes Miss Hastings, in our part."

"Thank you, Susan! I am so glad of that. I love her so much, though I never saw her last night. I don't know how it is, but I don't want to know some people at all to love them. I only want to look at them."

We had now entered my aunt's bedroom, and Susan had begun to make the bed. I stood still before the portrait of Mr. Arundel Raby for some time. "I love *him*," I said at length, "only from seeing his picture. Is he so *very* ill, Susan?"

Susan looked a little alarmed at this question, and replied, shaking a blanket with unnecessary energy, "I can't tell. How should I know?—Don't ask me any questions, child.—What do you stand staring at that picture for all this time?—Why don't you look at these beautiful ladies? This is the Countess Caroline, my lord's mother. This is my lady."

"Because I like *this* picture better than all the rest put together. But who are those little girls?"

"They are Lady Alice and Lady Geraldine Raby, the only children of the earl and countess. You would like to have them here to play with."

"I don't like playing with girls," I said.

Susan took me presently to see the painted window in the banqueting-room. Keats' description of the window of Madeline's chamber, in the "St. Agnes' Eve," might have been written for this darling and admiration of my childhood.

I could not satiate my eyes with gazing; and when, at last, Susan was obliged to take me away, she promised that I should go into that room every day as long as I stayed. The chapel and the library, though they became dear to me in after-life, made little impression upon me then;—my mind's eye was dazed with the glories of colour. I have fancied, since, that Titian and Rubens must have intoxicated their spirits during infancy with the magic wine distilled from the rainbow;—that they must have found in Italian and Flemish cathedrals and palaces the gladdening influences which in a less degree, streamed into my soul from the walls and windows of that banqueting-room. I have seen much finer specimens of colour since, but I would not lose the recollection of my first week's silent, solitary revel in that deserted room for a hecatomb of *chef-d'œuvres* by the best masters. I walked out with my father and aunt; and I saw deer and trees, and water, but all through "innumerable stains and splendid dyes."

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## CHAPTER V.

### A GLIMPSE OF HIDDEN THINGS.

My father spent a few days with his sister, and then returned home, leaving me under her care. The first month of my stay was filled with enjoyment and renovated health. I drank in knowledge copiously, and my imagination was always active. I believe the only drawback to my bliss was the certainty that it would soon come to an end; that I must go home at last, and be sent to school with my boisterous brothers.

I soon made myself tolerably acquainted with the geography of the castle, at least of those parts which, as Susan

expressed it, "were allowed to be shown." I ran about and played in them, much as I liked. Susan was my frequent companion, and I soon became very fond of her. Joyce I never took to thoroughly. I could not forget that disrespectful look when he and Susan had quarrelled about my aunt. I did not understand anything by it, more than the fact that he did not seem to like her. This I could not forgive. Besides, he was very cross to me sometimes, and would never allow me to go near a fine conservatory which extended along great part of the terrace, and which I felt an irresistible longing to enter. I would follow him slyly when I knew he was going there, and try to peep at the wondrous and beautiful plants within; but the lower part of the glass was ground, so that I could see nothing except at a door. Never once would he listen to my entreaty.

"No, no, Master Frank," he would say; "I never let little boys in here. Why, Lord Carleton would cut my head off if he thought I allowed a little boy even to look into it. When your aunt likes to bring you here, well and good—I have nothing to say agin *that*, of course. But I won't have any little boys damaging my plants. I wonder what my lord would say! Here, you Maddox! mind you never let this gentleman come running and making a litter on my terrace."

Maddox was a tall, stout man, who used to walk a great deal up and down that same terrace, and always drove me away whenever he saw me approaching. I never could find out what Maddox did besides walk up and down that side of the castle. It seemed to me to be a very easy sort of life. When I asked my aunt what Maddox did there, she told me he was the watchman, and that there was always a watchman about the castle. When I asked why he did not watch all round the castle, instead of on that side only, my aunt replied that Lord Carleton valued the things on that side of the castle more than those elsewhere. I thought that Lord Carleton was in the right there,—as the beautiful conservatory and my aunt's parlour and the south corridor, with the painted window and the beautiful pictures, were all on that



side. I was not allowed to play in the south corridor, which led to what were called the countess's rooms, although I went into it once or twice with François or my aunt.

François was the old Frenchman whom I had seen eating his breakfast in the window-recess on the morning after my arrival. I thought then that he looked cross; but I soon had reason to alter my opinion, and became very fond of him at the end of a week. He never seemed to have anything to do but read a book and look out of the windows and walk in the corridors—the south (the one I was not allowed to play in) and the west, which led to my aunt's bedroom. He never seemed to go into any other parts of the building. I always found him in the same place, and glad to see me. I generally spent the first hour after breakfast with François. He would take me on his knee, and explain heraldic books, in which I soon began to take an interest. He would smile brightly, and pat me on the head, saying :

*"Bien, bien, mon petit! C'est dommage que tu n'es pas né grand seigneur, car tu en as bien l'air!"* or some such thing; and when I requested that he would explain his meaning in English, as I did not understand French yet, he would tell me that he had said, "I vill teach you la langue Française, and then you vill be able to seem quite like one lord." And François began to give me lessons in French.

One evening, early in June, I sat in the window of my aunt's parlour, reading an old book which I had borrowed from François. King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table had then complete possession of my mind. I had been sent out across the park with a message to John Green, the keeper, by my aunt. Reluctantly had I laid aside my book, and departed. Fortune seemed to favour me; for, scarcely had I been gone ten minutes when I met Green himself, and joyfully delivered the message, and scampered back, in glee, to my dear story-book; having escaped an hour and a half's absence from it. Aunt Margaret was gone from the parlour, but there was no need to find her on purpose to tell her I had been saved the walk. She would return presently, and then

I could tell her why I had come back so soon. So I flung myself on the cushioned window-seat, and, resting the great book on the ledge of the open window, went on devouring my tale, and conjuring up a vision of Sir Launcelot du Lac. The rays of the setting sun made my head quite warm, and dazzled my eyes by playing on the page. Bees, heavily laden, buzzed slowly homewards from the near flower-beds; other insects flew past tinged with all colours; soft breezes, sweet with perfumes, lifted my hair,—but of these I saw and felt nothing. I was absorbed in my book. At last, however, when the sun had gone down, the wind blew cooler, and I could no longer see the faint brown type. I closed the book, and, in a fit of childish musing, sat gazing out over the fast-darkening landscape.

How still everything seemed! All was quiet within the huge castle; and nothing moved or made a sound without, except the breeze in the magnolia which was trained against the window. I sat a long time, calling up picture after picture from the story I had read, and painting them on the dark landscape. I saw Queen Guenever, in a green velvet robe, walking in the forest. I saw Sir Launcelot fight with another knight. I saw the whole Court of King Arthur at a tournament. Suddenly my reverie was interrupted. A strange sound of voices seemed very near me. I looked round; there was no one in the dark room. It must be Susan and Joyce talking in some of the lower passages, as they often did, I knew, in the evening. I rose and opened the door of the room. All was still in that direction. It must have been fancy!—and vexed at having been interrupted in my reverie, I turned back towards my former seat in the window. Before reaching it, I heard the same sounds again. They seemed to come from the recess where the organ stood. I entered it, and though it was quite dark, I felt sure that there was nobody there. I therefore concluded that there must be some persons talking in the corridor above, and was turning away again to the window, when a voice sounded indistinctly, speaking near me—a man's voice—one that I did not remember to have

heard before. His words did not reach my ear; but these in reply did:

"Indeed! indeed! you are wrong! If my lord——" And the voice that uttered them was that of my Aunt Margaret.

For a moment I was bewildered, and a little terrified. Where was she? Who was she talking to—"My lord!"—It must be Lord Carleton come home to the castle! Again I heard the other voice; and this time the words were plain enough; their tone I shall never forget, for my heart-strings vibrated to that deep, wild, pathetic music.

"Margaret Hastings, why are you so proud? May I not seek to add a little to your happiness? Hear me, now, Margaret! *My Margaret!*"

There was a pause as if feeling had impeded utterance; and I heard my aunt's soothing voice again.

"I *will* hear all you have to say; but not now. You shall see the child. Rest assured that——" The words seemed to die in the distance, as if the speakers were moving slowly away.

Let the reader imagine the state of my mind as I stood rolling my eyes round about, above, and below, in the darkness, as if I expected the walls to open and reveal the secret place in which my aunt held converse so strange. A recollection came suddenly, like an inspiration, to my mind. There was a space—a something—perhaps a *door*, at the back of the organ. I had noticed it on the night of my arrival, and had forgotten it since. I crept round the instrument, fearlessly, dark as it was.—Ah! what was that?—A bright light streaming through a keyhole. If I had been a few years older, I should have hesitated to gratify my curiosity by looking through a keyhole. I gave myself no time for reflection, but darted at once to the spot. At first I could see nothing but a blaze of light. After a few minutes, objects became distinct; or, at least, I seemed to see them distinctly. Yet vividly and distinctly as I saw them, it was difficult to believe they were real—that I was not dreaming! They were so similar to those which fancy had called up in my late reverie over that

beautiful fairy romance, that for some moments I doubted whether I were not one of those fortunate children I had read of who are favoured by fairies, and permitted to see things invisible to common human eyes. I had been assured that there were no such things as fairies; and that the stories about King Arthur and the glorious world of romantic chivalry were not true. But what of that? Could I disbelieve my eyes?

The magic world on the other side of that door was more beautiful than any I had pictured to myself. I looked down a long arcade of trees and shrubs of a strange growth and marvellous beauty. They were trees and shrubs of a foreign land, I knew; for I had seen pictures of many of them. Palms and acacias, date-trees and plantains, bent their graceful tops from either side, and formed a luxuriant arch, from the centre of which, at regular intervals, hung what seemed to me to be the most beautiful silver and alabaster lamps, which shed a mild radiance—something between sunlight and moonlight—up among the feathery acacias and the broad palms, and down upon the dark green tropical vegetation, which grew thickly beneath them, and clustered round their tall stems, showing here and there the richest-coloured blossoms. The pathway down this grove was paved with the most delicate mosaic. Far away, where the lamps were blended in one cluster, and where the trees seemed to meet each other, a fountain sprang up into the air, and fell again in a shower of glittering spray. Its basin I could not see. It looked as if it had sprung, at a wish, from the ground, at the feet of the two persons who stood beside it.

Were *they* mere mortals?—A man and a woman? Their attitudes were so dignified, that to me they seemed a true King and Queen of Romance. At first I could not see their faces; but presently they turned, and began to walk slowly down the beautiful arcade towards the door where I was.

Could that graceful, stately lady be, indeed, my aunt? My aunt transformed into a queen! How well the transforma-

tion became her! Queen Guenever, in my fancy, had worn just such a green velvet gown, sweeping the ground as she walked; and ever after, when I pictured that fair dame to my eye, she wore a headdress such as my aunt wore then. It was a sort of kerchief of netted gold laid over the top of the head, looped up gracefully on either side, with the ends touching the shoulders. It was rich and simple, and to my fancy the fine dress made my aunt's sweet face perfectly beautiful. Her dark eyes looked larger and more lustrous than usual, as they were raised to the face of her companion, who looked down upon her with a sort of melancholy satisfaction. If I was astonished at seeing my own near relation in such a mysterious position, I was much more so when I recognised in her companion the original of that portrait which had laid so firm a hold on my fancy. To be sure, the person I now saw bodily walking with my aunt was much older-looking than the picture. But I never doubted for a moment that it was Mr. Arundel Raby. The costume was somewhat like that of the picture, and the wild beauty of the features was scarcely altered by years, except, perhaps, that the face was more full of thought, and of a certain indescribable tenderness.

They lingered in their walk, and pointed out to each other various beautiful blossoms. Mr. Raby stepped aside to gather a flower which my aunt admired; as he bent his head, in presenting it, she raised one of her beautiful arms, and putting back a mass of hair which had fallen over his forehead, looked earnestly into his eyes. Soon she smiled—that sweet smile of hers,—and I heard her say:

“Yes, it is true. You are much better this time. God be thanked! We must be more careful with you now.”

“And you, Margaret,” said he, touching her cheek gently with the flower, “you look better. You are brighter than usual. You seldom look so on our first meeting. Your brother's visit has done this; or perhaps, the presence of the child.”

“Perhaps it is that. But I shall be better still; and so I

think you will if we have a little music. Will you give me some now?"

"Will I not?" And his melancholy face became radiant. He stepped towards the door, behind which I remained, breathless with curiosity.

"Stay, love," said my aunt; "it is fastened on the other side, and there may be some one there. You had better ring for François."

Mr. Raby walked away towards the fountain. My aunt stood still where he had left her. She held to her lips the beautiful flower he had given her; and her calm, deep eyes followed him as he went. Had I been old enough to read all that her attitude and her face expressed, I should have earned a lesson concerning the perfection of womanly love. He came back with a quicker step towards her, and the smile returned to her face. Again he drew her arm within his, and they moved on together—a noble, loving pair—looking silently on each other with the fulness of confidence and affection. Presently François appeared, walking towards them. Mr. Raby spoke briefly, in French.

To whom François replied, "*Oui, mitor*;" and then glanced towards my aunt. She said a few words in the same language; among which I detected "*cette porte*," "*mon neveu*," and "Susan," which I understood. François bowed and retired. I just stayed to watch the two stately figures begin to glide once more down that beautiful grove, and then I crept away from my loophole of observation back into the dark parlour, where I took up my former place at the window, and looked out into the dusky park. All was as still as before, except my own young heart, which beat wildly with wonder and curiosity at the scene to which I had just been a witness. In a few minutes Susan came into the room with a lamp.

"Oh, there you are, Master Frank. I have been looking everywhere for you. Your aunt has sent to say you are to go to bed directly. It is long past your bedtime. Come along."

And catching me up in her arms, the merry girl carried me off to bed ; where, as the reader may suppose, I did not go to sleep very soon, especially as the full notes of the organ and some other musical instruments, besides the sounds of the human voice in concert with them, were borne, now fully and distinctly, now vaguely and faintly, to my listening ear. I was sorely tempted to steal out of bed, and find my way nearer to that delicious music, but I was afraid to displease my aunt ; and so I lay looking at the portrait of Mr. Arundel Raby, as it gleamed out in the moonlight, and thinking what a nice face he had, and how glad I was that he was so fond of my aunt. Suddenly a thought came into my mind—Why did people call her an old maid ? She was Mr. Arundel Raby's wife I was almost sure. But then why did she call herself Miss Hastings ? I was puzzled by that. Again I was puzzled by Mr. Raby's sudden appearance. He did not look so very ill. He was able to get up and walk. How did he come to the castle ? I did not think it possible that a carriage could arrive, and I know nothing about it. Then how had a grand gentleman come to see my aunt, and I had heard no word of his coming, and no sound of wheels or horses. Then the strange region in which I had seen such wonders ! Was it fairyland ? *That* puzzled me more than anything else, and I began to fancy the whole thing was nothing but an invention of my own. The vision grew fainter and fainter, and I fell asleep.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### A NEW FRIEND.

WHEN I awoke the next morning, my aunt was moving about softly, as usual, completing her ordinary toilette. It was a very different costume from the one I had seen, or dreamed I had seen, her wear on the previous evening. The plain white morning gown, and the lace cap tied beneath the chin, the apron of black silk, these were common-place adorn-

ments for a lady of romance. This was my Aunt Margaret, Miss Hastings. Was this the stately dame of my beautiful vision?

She approached my bed with a smile. "What makes you stare at me so, Frank? What are you thinking of?"

I blushed, and cast down my eyes.

"What is the matter? Have you done or thought anything wrong, my dear?"

"Yes," I faltered. And then, unable to hide my secret longer, I told her all. I shall not forget the perplexed expression of her countenance.

"I am sorry you listened at a door, and peeped through a keyhole, Frank. But I see you are ashamed of having done so. No honest person ever does such things—much less a boy who hopes one day to become a true gentleman."

"But aunt, dear aunt, I forgot that I *was* peeping and prying. Everything was so wonderful and beautiful, I could not take away my eyes. It was like a part of 'King Arthur.' And, aunt, you looked just like Queen Guenever!"

My aunt coloured and laughed a little. "That is no compliment. She was a bad woman. She told lies and deceived her husband."

"But she was beautiful, aunt, and grand, and stately—like you last night."

"But I am not beautiful, Frank; though you think so because you love me."

"Aunt," and I hesitated. "The gentleman who was with you last night"—and I looked at the picture—"he thinks you beautiful, too, because he loves you. I know by the way he looked at you last night."

My aunt glanced at the picture in some little confusion.

"Are you his wife, aunt?" I asked.

She turned her head quickly to me and said, "No, my love."

"Are you going to be married to him, aunt?"

She became pale, and bending over me, kissed my cheek gently, and said very softly, "No, my love."

"Aunt, dear," said I, kissing her, and trying to see her



eyes—they were filled with tears—"why are you not going to be married to him? Would he not like to have you for a wife? I think he would."

My aunt now spoke in a low, firm tone, which was calculated to make me obey her commands. "You must not ask these questions, Frank. I cannot answer them, because you could not understand what I should have to say to you. You will see Mr. Arundel Raby to-day, and perhaps often again; but you must remember not to ask *him* such questions; you must not ask François, or Susan, or Joyce."

"Why not, aunt?"

"Because I wish you not to do so. If you love me as much as I think you do, you will restrain your curiosity upon this matter, because I tell you to do so. You are not old enough to understand the reasons why."

"Aunt, I will do exactly as you say. I will not ask any questions about it. But you know I cannot help thinking and guessing. I think and guess about everything I don't understand."

She smiled. "I dare say you do. But I would advise you to think and guess as little as possible about this, because the more you think and guess the less you will understand, until you are very many years older."

I then began to ask questions, which were not interdicted, concerning the identity of the gentleman I had seen last night with the original of the picture, and was soon satisfied on that point. It was the same person, about twenty years older. Then I inquired as to the place in which I had seen that splendid vision. To my amazement, I found it was the large conservatory which Joyce would never allow me to enter. My aunt promised to take me into it that very morning. I then asked her when and how Mr. Raby had come to the castle; and my aunt explained to me that he always lived at the castle; that he had been there ever since I came: but that he had been very ill, and unable to move from his own set of rooms, which were at the other end of the south corridor.

"But why did nobody tell me that?" I asked.

"Because nobody likes to talk of Mr. Raby's illness."

"Is it very painful?" I asked, with the natural shrinking of a child from physical torture.

"Very painful, Frank. More painful than any illness you ever saw. You must not remind him of it, now he is well. We must all help him to forget it."

"I would not speak of it for the world!" I exclaimed. "Poor Mr. Raby! Shall I see him to-day? I will be very quiet, and not disturb him, and do just what he bids me. I love him already, aunty."

"Yes, you will see him to-day. Now that he is better he will like to see you. He is fond of children; and he has heard from François that you are a good little boy."

"Oh, François. Yes, I saw him last night, too. He is Mr. Raby's servant, I suppose?"

"Not a servant. He has lived with him all his life. François is very fond of Mr. Raby. Now make haste and dress. You may put on your pretty blue tunic to-day, as you are going to pay a visit to Mr. Raby. I will come back for you presently, and we will go down to breakfast together."

Here was the mystery cleared up, and my conscience lightened by this little conversation with my aunt. And what fresh sources of delight were opening for me! I should see that beautiful man whose face had haunted me so long. Perhaps, if I took pains to please him, he might like me; and I felt a glow of pleasure at the thought. How kind my aunt had been when I told her about my prying and listening! I felt quite ashamed of it, and made a vow that I would never be tempted to peep through a keyhole any more;—it was so disgraceful. I hoped she would not tell Mr. Raby, or François, or Susan. I did not mind *her* knowing it; she would be sure never to tell me of it again, unkindly. Then, there was that wonderful conservatory to be seen; and I felt a little boyish malice at thus triumphing over Joyce and his ally, Maddox. I was very happy that morning till, as I fastened the blue tunic, which I had not worn since my mother put it on, my thoughts suddenly reverted to her. How long it was since

I had seen her! Dear, kind mamma! I was vexed when I thought how very little she had been in my memory during these happy weeks at Carleton, and was astonished to think that I could have forgotten her, and old Sarah too. When my aunt returned to the chamber, she found me with a troubled countenance and tearful eyes. With her usual sweetness she entered into my grief, and endeavoured to soothe it, and heal my self-inflicted wounds.

"Oh, aunt, I am so glad you think we may love anybody very much, and not be thinking of them always. It would be shocking to forget mamma because I have begun to love you—I mean, to love her less. I hope I shall know a great many people to love. It makes one feel so happy to love anybody—and so good, too. I should never do wrong things, I think, if I were always with people I love very, very much. Do you know, aunt," I continued, as she led me out of the room, "I feel as if I were going to love Mr. Raby—really love him—not just a little, but as much as ever I can; so that I shall not like to think about leaving him and you, though I do want to see mamma and papa."

She stooped and kissed my forehead. "I hope you will love him; it will make him glad. We are going to breakfast with him now."

We entered a beautiful breakfast-room, which I had not seen before, as it belonged to the suite of rooms occupied by Mr. Raby. My aunt gave me leave to look about me, while she busied herself at the table in preparing breakfast. Presently she rang a little silver bell, and François appeared. I ran up to my old friend, and shouted "*Bon jour, mon vieux!*" as he had taught me to do, and added as usual, "*embrasse-moi.*" François seemed a little embarrassed, but was evidently glad to see me, and smiled, and nodded, and kissed me. "*Bon jour, bon jour, mon petit! Ah! tu es content de venir déjeuner avec Madame Hastings et mîlor! Et moi, madame,*" he said, addressing himself to my aunt, "*j'en suis content aussi; ça fait du bien d'être avec les enfans; ça amuse beaucoup. Ils sont si bons, si innocents, les enfans.*"

Nothing could be more respectful than old François' manner, and yet nothing could be more unlike the manner of an English footman or valet. His service was not mere eye or lip service; it was the service of affection. He loved Mr. Raby heartily, and my aunt he loved and revered almost as much. When I grew up, I learned to appreciate at its proper value François' judgment of, and conduct to, my aunt. He was a noble old fellow! Indeed, he had a right to the term noble in more senses than one, for he had a *De* to his name, and was the youngest son of a younger brother of a good family in Picardy, that had once been possessed of an estate as well as of a title. François de Merville was bound to the family of the late Earl of Carleton by certain obligations, which as a man and a gentleman he felt that he could not, if he would, cut asunder; and he devoted his best years to the service of Mr. Arundel Raby. But I shall have more to communicate to the reader on this subject hereafter; in the meantime, I must record what followed François' appearance on my aunt's summons. They spoke in French, which had better be translated.

"Is Mr. Arundel ready to come to breakfast?"

"Yes, madam; he waits for you. In the meantime he gives orders to Maddox."

"Go and tell him I am here. Say also that I have brought my little nephew with me."

François goes out, smiling and nodding at me. A few moments elapse, in which I ask various questions about the novelties in the room, which my aunt answers less attentively than usual; then the door opens, and the figure of Mr. Arundel Raby was before us. I looked up at him in mute admiration, much as I was in the habit of looking at his picture; and he looked down at me, as I fancied the picture looked in return. His dress was black. The coat was long and loose, made of rich velvet, without any embroidery or unnecessary appendage, and hung in graceful folds. It gave him a picturesque appearance; although, if he had worn that ugliest of earthly garments, a dress-coat, he would have looked graceful and majestic. Mr. Raby wanted no aid from art to show

that he was unlike, and in many things superior to, other men; yet the tailor's art, which had been exercised to suit his convenience, tended to increase his personal distinction, and to give him a striking individuality, without giving anything eccentric or fantastic to his appearance, which he would have considered as a mark of bad taste. In this bright morning light I could see that he was very pale and thin,—that the wild, bright eyes which had so fascinated me in the picture, were as large and bright as ever; but they seemed to be much more deeply sunken in his head, and to have become full of sadness. However, they smiled kindly on me—so kindly, that I felt drawn towards him; and before he had been a minute in the room—before he had spoken a word—I advanced boldly, and put my little hand into the one he held out towards me. The smile brightened, and a slight tinge of red came over the pale cheek. He bent his head, so that he might look better at me and said,—

“What is your name, my dear child?”

“Francis Hastings.”

“Francis! Ah, that is a very good name. So you have come to take breakfast with me.” And seating himself near my aunt at the table, he placed me on his knee, and began to examine my features. “I am looking for the resemblance which François says is so strong.”

“Do you see it?” she asked.

“Certainly! It is very striking. A stranger seeing him in this house would not hesitate to say, ‘There is a thorough Raby face!’ And yet, Margaret, he has something about him which reminds me strongly of you. He is like the Hastings family too; for your father had just such eyes. What a strange thing is this likeness of one human being to another! One would like to arrive at some satisfactory theory on the subject.”

“Yes,” replied my aunt. “Do you know all that Lavater says on this subject?”

“No; and I do not wish to know—unless, indeed, you think it particularly satisfactory.”

"It is anything but satisfactory to my mind. There is one thing in physiognomical resemblance I feel tolerably certain about, though Lavater did not help me to the conviction; I arrived at it by means of my own unassisted genius. It is this: that whenever there is a physical resemblance between two individuals there is a corresponding mental resemblance."

Mr. Raby put his arm round me, and pressed his lips to my forehead, murmuring, "Poor child! That would be a sad faith to hold."

"I believe Frank will grow up to be a good, brave, and wise man." And my aunt looked steadily at me. I was looking at her, and devouring every word they uttered.

"Oh, aunty, that is just what I want to be! Do you really believe that if I try hard to cure all my faults, and to learn all I can, I shall ever become a great man?"

"You will become what I call a *great* man, Frank; that is, a thoroughly good man; one who never leaves off trying to be better."

"Aunt, don't you think we should be good and great if we always lived with good and great people—people who talk and think about good and great and beautiful things?"

"It would help us very much, at all events, to become wise and virtuous, my boy," said Mr. Raby, looking at me curiously.

"I wish——" I exclaimed vehemently, and then stopped, and coloured deeply.

"What do you wish? Say it out, my dear. Your aunt and I would like to know what you wish so eagerly."

"I wish I could live with Aunt Margaret and you in this beautiful castle till I am grown up. I do think then I should be a good and brave and wise man. That is what I was thinking of."

Mr. Raby turned with a triumphant look to my aunt. "There, Margaret; do I need a better advocate? Does not the oracle speak plainly? Surely you cannot misinterpret it."

My aunt looked at me for a moment, but made no reply.

"And so, my boy," said Mr. Raby, stroking my hair gently,

"you would like to come and live with me and Aunt Margaret always, and be our little boy?"

"Yes—*no!*"—I added hurriedly, correcting myself—"not *always*. I cannot leave papa and mamma, and Tom and Harry and Lucy. I love them so much, and mamma would be very unhappy to lose me."

My aunt looked pleased, but said nothing. Mr. Raby, too, looked pleased, and said: "But if papa and mamma wished you to live here?"

"But they never *would* wish it. They love me very much. No. I should like to stay a long time with you, and—I do love aunt very, very much; I can't tell *how much*; but I love my mamma and papa more than all the world. I would not be *your* little boy, even. No; I will not leave my mamma and papa. I cannot. If you please, Aunt Margaret, I must go home. I ought to love my home better than this fine castle. How can I be a good boy, and learn to do what the Catechism says, while I stay here? How can I do my duty in that state of life into which it has pleased God to call me?" I felt very strong at that moment, and, sliding down from Mr. Raby's knee, I went up to my aunt. I said: "If you please, aunt, send me home. I love to be here; but I must go home." I saw the tears in her eyes.

"Are you satisfied now, Margaret, that your nephew is worthy to be my heir? Do you not acknowledge now that he has his patent of nobility direct from Heaven? Do not hinder me in my attempt to make such a creature as useful in his generation as I have been useless. God in His wisdom denied me the blessing of wife and children. If I may not call you wife, let me have that child for my heir. He is your nearest kin."

He paused. My aunt did not speak, and he went on:—

"I have watched this child frequently. I have overheard his innocent, intelligent prattle with François. I have seen him alone in his play. He has the stamp of goodness and unconscious nobility. There is nothing ignoble about him. Were I to search through the world, I could not find a more

promising child. Margaret, there is no good reason why I should not adopt him as my heir."

"Will not the world see in your adoption of my nephew rather a proof that you are the dupe of a mercenary, designing woman, than that she is one whom you ought to honour?"

"I will force the world to honour you as you deserve. My own family are ready to assist me."

"Better leave me alone in my obscurity, Arundel. The world will not be willing to honour those who care not, or seem not to care, for its laws. Could the world's honour,—could wealth—high station—make me happier than I am, think you? To say that I am *happy* would be nonsense. There are very few of us sent here to be happy; but I would not change my lot for that of any woman on earth. Am I not rich in affection? What care I for the ceremonious honour of a crowd of strangers, when I know that I have the respect and esteem of all those who know what my life has been—at least, what I have striven to make it? While Lord and Lady Carleton and my brother James give me their approbation, what can I suffer from the observations of unloving relations or of strangers upon my conduct? The motives of this conduct they cannot understand. I take part with this good, self-denying boy. He had better go home ere he acquire tastes and habits not consonant with his station."

Mr. Raby looked very pale; and I remember putting out my hand to him, and saying: "Don't be unhappy. They will let me come and see you. I will tell mamma that you are very ill sometimes, and then she will be sure to let me come."

At that moment François opened the door, seemingly in some dispute with a person outside. "*Mais c'est impossible!* You cannot enter *par ici*. I will announce to madame," he said, in a suppressed tone of indignation.

"But there is not a moment to be lost, I tell you, mounseer! I must see Mrs. Hastings and Master Frank. I tell you there's life and death in the matter!"

I knew the voice of the woman who spoke. It was that of Sarah, my nurse. What had Sarah come for? To fetch me



home, perhaps. Strange inconsistency of human nature! I now shrank from the fulfilment of my late request, and dreaded to go home;—not from apprehension of the true meaning of her hurried words, but from regret at leaving this beautiful—too beautiful—world at Carleton. I drew closer to my aunt, while Mr. Raby turned towards the door, and inquired of François what was the cause of the disturbance.

Sarah was a person of authority at home, and was not disposed to be kept out when she had a mind to come in; therefore, while François was about to explain, she pushed past him, and with a flushed and agitated face stood before us. She curtsied to my aunt and Mr. Raby; but when I ran up to her, she sank on the nearest chair, and burst into tears.

My aunt was alarmed, and rising from her seat, put her hand on the poor woman's shoulder.

"You have brought bad news, Sarah. What is it?—My brother?"

"No, no. My mistress!—my mistress!"

"Is she ill?"

"Dying!—dying! The doctor says she can't live three days."

"She wants to see her child?"

"Yes, yes! Bless him. Poor dear boy! my precious darling!" And here the good woman kissed me vehemently. I understood that my mother was ill—dying; and I began to weep bitterly. "My mistress wants to see you, too, ma'am. Master hopes you will come. He had no time to write."

"I will go." She glanced for a moment at Mr. Raby.

"Certainly. You had better go with the child. Don't delay a moment. Let Frank stay with me while you prepare for your departure."

I had left off sobbing. The beating of my heart had ceased. The first cold, dark feeling of misery—immense, unknown, inevitable, irremediable—was overshadowing me. Dying! My mother was dying! What was it to die? What was it to have any one we love, die? *To be dead* meant to be buried in the damp, cold ground of the churchyard—that I knew;

and *to be dead* meant to be gone away to God—I knew that, too. Was it, indeed, true that mamma was going away, so that I never should see her any more? What should I do without her? Oh, if I could only see her, and tell her how much I loved her! Surely I should see her once more. Sarah said something about three days! While these painful feelings were torturing my heart, I felt myself raised gently from the ground in Mr. Raby's arms, and with my head resting on his breast, he walked up and down the room, soothing me with soft words and gentle caresses. They opened my heart, and I poured out my pent-up feelings. I drank in all that fell from those lips; I promised to be a good boy, and think of what he had said, and bear the worst patiently, because it would be God's will.

When Susan came to dress me for the journey, I was lying calm, though tearful, in the arms of my new friend.

"May I ever come here again and see you?" I asked, as he lifted me into the carriage.

"I hope so, my dear," he said. Then he looked at my aunt. "Tell James all that I wish. If he thinks with you, still let him remember that, for this child of his, he will always find a friend in his old playmate, Arundel Raby. God bless you!—You can write a letter, Frank? Write to me, and tell me how your mother is."

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## CHAPTER VII.

### MY FIRST AFFLICTION.

EVERY one who has lost his mother in manhood feels the pathetic truth which the poet Gray has put into a few simple words—"We can have but one mother." Other affections may be replaced, but a mother's love—where shall we find a substitute for that? I was too young when I lost mine to understand the full meaning, or half the meaning, of the term "mother's love." I only knew that she—the sun of our

home—round whom all lesser bodies revolved, and from whom they received light and warmth,—she, our guide and comforter, our joy, and trust, and admiration—who seemed to me almost omnipotent and omniscient—the perfection of beauty—who could do no wrong—that she was gone away for ever.

I remember little about my journey home. I was more capable of grief than most children of my age; and I grieved terribly during the long, long, weary drive,—for grief is terrible when we know not *what* it is that is about to fall upon us and all dear to us. Still the thought of Mr. Arundel Raby was a fixed source of consolation. I felt as if I could bear anything that he told me I ought to bear. I sat very still, and tried to recollect all he had said to me. My aunt leaned back in the chaise, and read out of a little book. I saw these words on the back—"De Imitatione Christi."

I was present when my mother died. She held me folded in her arms, and I heard the last words she uttered. They were of anxiety for me, her youngest child. My aunt promised to aid my father in watching over my health. She spoke then of Mr. Arundel Raby's desire to adopt me, and her words pleased my poor mother. She urged my father to consider the proposal. "It will help all our children forward in life. If *you* should be taken, what will become of them?"

I remember my father promised to consider well what Mr. Arundel asked; and then he spoke of the great God, who is the father of the fatherless. My mother seemed comforted by his words. I was the only witness of their last parting. Of that I cannot speak.

I was removed from her arms without knowing that it was a corpse I clung to so fondly.

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About a week afterwards, my aunt, who stayed with us for a short time after our family affliction, asked me to fulfil my promise, and write to Mr. Raby. She wished to give me some occupation that would distract my mind a little from the gloomy household.

It was much less trouble to me to write than it is to most

children. I showed an early love of scribbling. Next to reading, my favourite in-door amusement had been writing letters to my mother about anything that interested me, on any scrap of paper I could lay my hands on.

My letter was as follows :—

“DEAR MR. RABY,—I have to tell you that my Dear mamma is dead. she died three days ago. I saw her die. did you ever see anybody die It is very dreadful, they let me stay in the room, and I never cried once, because aunt said it would make poor mamma unhapy. I was very miserable; but I kept on saying over to myself some of the things you said to me, *that* kept me from crying. My mamma held me in her arms when she died, and then I do not know what happened, for I seemed to fall asleep. poor papa is very unhapy. I think he cries a great deal when Nobody sees him. He likes to have us all with him; and this morning aunt Margaret read the Bible were it says ‘I am the resurrection and the life.’ I do not understand *that*. I wish you knew my mamma, and what a dear, kind, good mamma she was. She was so glad to see me, she loved me very much. Tom and Harry have been crying a great deal, I can see. They are such kind, good brothers. I am fond of them. They and Lucy are home for their hollidays, and were going to have such fun when poor mamma fell ill. Aunt Margaret told me to write to you, and so I came out of the parlour to write this in dear mamma’s dresing-room. My desk is kept there. The men have brought the coffin. I heard them in the next room. Sarah thinks that perhaps mamma’s spirit is there, and heres all we say. What do you think I should like her spirit to be with me always. I do not think I should ever do rong things if I rememberd that she could see me always. But God is always with us, and he can know and see more than any angle or dead person. Dear Mr. Raby, I like writing to you; but, now I want to leve of because the tears keep making blots on the paper. Indeed, I do try not to cry, but I cannot help it when I think that my own darling mamma is dead. Can you

read this? I dare say the writing is bad and the spelling all wrong. I will write you a better letter next time.

"I remain, dear Mr. Raby,

"Your dutiful and affectionate young friend,

"FRANCIS HASTINGS."

Some days after my mother's funeral, Mrs. Russell, a widowed sister of my father's, came to live with him and superintend his household; and my Aunt Margaret returned alone to Carleton. I was sorry to lose her, but I did not wish to leave my father, towards whom my affection seemed to have deepened wonderfully, while his love for me acquired all the fondness of my mother's. He liked to have me with him always; even when the others went away. This was natural enough at that time, for I was the youngest and the quietest; besides, I was my mother's darling, concerning whom she had shown the greatest anxiety on her death-bed.

One morning I went to his room as usual before breakfast. He was dressed and sitting by the open window, reading a letter. He took me on his knee, and after kissing me affectionately, looked steadily in my face while he spoke as follows:—"I want to speak to you very seriously, my dear child. Do you remember Mr. Arundel Raby?"

"Oh, yes, papa. He wrote me a letter when——" I stopped, and looked away from my father. By a tacit consent we never spoke about my mother's death.

"He has written me a letter now. Can you guess what it is about?"

"About me? He would like to have me for his own little boy. He has no children to love him, papa, as you have." And I kissed him.

"Would you like to be his child, Frank?"

"No, papa. I would not like to be anybody's child but yours."

"But Mr. Raby can give you a better education than I can. He can make you rich, so that you need never go to 'the nasty, gloomy counting-house,' as you call it. You can live

in a fine castle of your own, not ten miles from here, and have carriages and horses, and everything that money can buy."

"I don't care for that, papa. Why do you say all that? I love you better than all the fine things in the world."

He kissed me tenderly. "I know you do, and I would not let you be Mr. Raby's child for all the fine things in the world. So I am glad we are of the same mind. But now there is another thing we must think of. I wish you to live with your Aunt Margaret for a year, or perhaps two years, till you go to school. Your aunt cannot come and live with us, and Dr. B—— tells me you will never grow strong and tall if you live here. Aunt Margaret wishes to have you with her at Carleton, and Mr. Arundel Raby, who is a very clever scholar, offers to superintend your education there, and to have a tutor for you when you are a little older, even if I will not let him adopt you for his own son. This would be much better than your going to school for a great many years to come. You would learn a great deal more; and you would be with Aunt Margaret, who would take as much care of you as——"

I knew what he meant. We looked at each other in silence.

"What do you think of that plan, my love?"

"What will you do without me, papa, dear?" And my arms went round his neck.

"I should have to do without you if you went to school. I should have to do without you in any case, my love; for you must not live here, and I am obliged to live here to attend to my business. I would rather let you go to Aunt Margaret than to any one."

"I would rather be at Carleton with her and Mr. Raby than anywhere else, except at home. I love them both very much; and Carleton is such a beautiful place. It makes me so happy to be there. I often wish our home were like that. If I could come home and see you all sometimes, and if Aunt Russell and Sarah will stay with you, I should like to be with Aunt Margaret, if you would like me to, papa."

"I should like it, my boy; because I think it would be right. So that is settled. I don't like to see these little cheeks so pale. I shall write to Mr. Raby and your aunt to-day, and tell them we are going to see them in three days. You must tell Sarah to have all your things ready, and on Friday morning you and I will go to Carleton Castle."

"Do you know Mr. Arundel Raby, papa?"

"Yes; I know him very well. I manage his property here, and I knew him very well when we were boys. We were good friends then, and used to play and learn together."

"How was that, papa?"

"Do you know the Rectory in the village of Carleton? Well—my father, that is your grandfather Hastings, was the clergyman there once. I and all my brothers and sisters were born there. I am a few years older than the earl and Mr. Arundel, and my father used to teach us all three, and your Aunt Margaret and your Aunt Sophia, too. So we boys used to be very intimate friends then, and we always liked each other, and do still, though we are so differently situated in life that we can very seldom meet."

"Do you know what made Mr. Raby so ill? People seem to think that he is very ill indeed."

"So he is; but I cannot explain to you exactly what is the matter with him."

"Papa, there seems to be a great deal of unhappiness in the world. Sarah told me only bad people are really unhappy. Now that can't be true, for *you* are unhappy; and Aunt Margaret, who speaks so cheerfully and looks so calm and happy—she is not always glad, I know; and then Mr. Raby—dear Mr. Raby!—he is in such great suffering. All the people I love best are unhappy, and I cannot help one of them. Papa, do you know that thought makes me very unhappy too, sometimes."

"Nay, nay, child; that should not be. If you grow up into a wise and good man, you will help every one of us to be happy."

"Yes, papa; but still I wish I could make you and Aunt

Margaret and Mr. Arundel forget that you ever were unhappy. All grown-up people seem to have a great deal of sorrow. It will be so nice to be a man, like you, papa! A little boy can do nothing! Oh, I wish I were a man!"

My father looked at me with a melancholy smile. It would have been lost time to endeavour to make the child understand that what seemed so beautiful and desirable to him—the manhood after which his soul yearned—was not so gladsome a thing as he believed.

When we reached Carleton that night, I was tired and sleepy; but I wanted very much to see Mr. Raby before I went to bed, therefore I contrived to keep awake until my father and my aunt had talked awhile; then I ventured to ask if I might go to see him.

"I do not know whether he can see you to-night, but we will inquire. If you are not too sleepy, go and ring the bell." My aunt wrote something on a slip of paper, and when Susan appeared, she desired her to "take that to François, and wait for an answer."

Susan soon came back with another piece of paper. My aunt read what was written on it, and turning with a smile to me, she said, "We are going to a place you will be delighted to see; but you must not ask to stay there long to-night. Papa and I want to talk with Mr. Raby, and you must go to bed very soon after he has seen you."

"I don't mind that, aunt. But I should not like to go to bed without seeing him. Where are we going now?" I asked, as she took a lighted taper from the mantelpiece, and led me across the room.

"You shall see. Will you come, too, James?" she said to my father. He rose and followed her to the organ recess—to the back of the instrument—the scene of my temptation and shame. Is she going to open that door? I thought. Yes! She took a key from her pocket, and fitted it into the lock. It was turned—the door was slowly pushed back, and there, indeed, was that Fairyland before me. The beautiful arcade with the palms and acacias on either side, and the rich blossoms



clustering below—the soft lamps hanging from above—the delicate fountain darting up into the air, and throwing itself down in diamond dust—there it was as wonderful, as incredibly beautiful as it had seemed to me before. I hesitated in the doorway. “Come in, my love;” and as my aunt spoke I saw Mr. Raby rise from a seat near the fountain, and, laying aside a large book, advance to meet us. I entered the conservatory, and in a few moments was pacing slowly up and down the mosaic pavement, with my hand in my father’s, listening to the talk between him and Mr. Raby, and admiring everything I saw. After a quarter of an hour, my aunt said :

“Now that you have met, you will have much to say to each other. I must leave you for a time; I want to go away with Frank. He and I have also a great deal to say to each other.”

My father stayed at the castle during the next day; the day after that he returned home. I was alone with him just before his departure, and said (for my mind was uneasy on the subject):

“Have you told Mr. Raby that I cannot be his little boy, papa?”

“Yes, my dear. I have had a long talk with him about you. He will be very kind to you, and be a friend to you always if you are good. It makes me happy to trust you with him and your aunt, because I know that you will be better cared for than you could be at home now. Remember, while you are here you are to obey them as you would me. Mr. Raby is anxious to have you properly taught. You are to have a tutor directly. You will take pains to learn everything that Mr. Raby wishes?”

“Oh yes, papa; I shall be very glad to learn. I want to be a clever man.”

“And, Frank, there is one thing more I wish to say. If anything should happen to me—if I should die—(Nay, my boy, we must all die)—you must then do what Aunt Margaret thinks best for you. She may think it well that Mr. Raby should adopt you for his own child when you have neither

father nor mother. But, even then, remember it is my wish that you learn to do something by which you may support yourself. You are old enough to know what *having a profession* means; now, I wish you to have a profession, even if you are to be Mr. Raby's heir. I would like you to be a clergyman, or a physician, or a lawyer. Do you understand?"

"Yes, papa; but I would not like to be a clergyman, or a physician, or a lawyer. I would like best to be a painter. Painting is a profession, too, aunt says."

"A painter!" exclaimed my father. "But, my boy, to be a painter one must have a genius for painting. I do not know that you have."

"I don't *know*, but I think I have. May I try? If Mr. Arundel will let me have a drawing-master, I should be, oh! so glad."

"It is a good thing to know how to draw, and to understand pictures, so there can be no harm in your learning; but I do not quite approve of your being an artist *only*. I would rather you were a clergyman. When I was a little boy, I wanted very much to be a clergyman, but my father could not afford to send me to a University."

"Shall I go to a University, papa?" I asked delightedly.

"Yes, my boy. If you pay attention to your studies there, you will be fitted for any position that a gentleman may occupy."

"Are *you* a gentleman, papa? Are manufacturers gentlemen?" This was a question which had forced itself into my mind lately.

"Yes, my dear. I am a gentleman by birth and education; but many manufacturers are not gentlemen. I cannot stay to talk to you any longer. The carriage will soon be here; and I have some papers to put up. You may come with me to my room."

Half an hour after that I stood on the top of one of the turrets, trying to watch the carriage that bore away my father as it wound along the road to P—.

I stood gazing at the spot where it finally disappeared,

the tears were in my eyes. Since I had lost my mother, a fear crept into my heart whenever I parted with those I loved—the fear that I might never see them again. It was natural, perhaps; but on this occasion it was so strong, that I caught hold of a hand that was near me, and held it fast. It was that of Mr. Raby.

“What is the matter, my child?” he asked tenderly.

“He has gone away!” I murmured. “Perhaps I may never see him any more.”

He took me in his arms, as he had done once before, and whispered words of comfort such as a childish mind could comprehend. Pillowed on that large heart, my eyes sought alternately his face, and the broad, blue sky above the turret-top;—peace came to my spirit, and that presentiment passed away.

But it was a true presentiment. I never saw my father again. Four months later he was attacked by a fever prevalent at North Ashurst among the colliers. It laid him among the dead in less than thirty-six hours. Dear, noble-hearted father! In after-years I learned to know all your worth; and then I would not have exchanged my dead father for any living one. No; not for the best of that aristocratic house on which I was engrafted.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### ADOPTION.

WE can most of us look back to some particular year in our past life, more full of events, more pregnant with influential causes, more abundant in distinct and palpable change for the individual *me*, than any other; though, to the thinking mind, no day passes by without showing a significance in connection with the whole of life which redeems it from the imputation of being dull and without interest. But how few of us are thinkers! Do we not, most of us, see the meaning of our years by the light of the feelings alone? Where they

shed no ray, all is as if it were not. We live from one emotion to another; making our lives alternate blank and excitement of heart or sense.

The *annus mirabilis* of my life came early. It was this same ninth year in which the events already narrated took place.

During the glorious autumn that followed my return to Carleton, I spent nearly all my days in the open air, rambling with the gamekeeper, riding with the grooms, driving and walking with my aunt; or, what I often loved best of all, roaming about alone, and losing myself in the distant woods of the park. I felt it a blessed thing to be a child—to be in no one's way, to be a free creature, and yet well cared for. Every one about the place was familiar with "little Master Hastings." I found companions of my own age in the village and at the gamekeeper's lodge, and everywhere my name was sufficient to ensure me a welcome. My grandfather's memory was held in high honour for several miles round, and my aunt had, in some measure, served to keep up the reputation of the family. People remembered my father as a boy; and spoke of him with admiration and affection. This always excited my gratitude; but I can recollect that I used to feel sorry that the old people found no resemblance in me to him. They all agreed that I was "not like any Hastings of them all—except *Miss Hastings*—she that was housekeeper now," but that I was "for all the world like the great family at the Castle." "If Mr. Arundel Raby had an own son, he could not be more like himself than little master." "It was a pity I was not his son," some said; others shook their heads; and some smiled significantly, and said, "Who knows?" I listened to all the village comments on my appearance, without understanding what I have since understood by them. My feeling at the time was contradictory: part of it was pleasure—a sort of gratified pride, perhaps, that I was considered like the great aristocratic family; the other part was pain, for I was sorry not to be like my father, whom I loved so much, and who was such a brave, handsome boy as the village people described.

During that autumn, when I lived all day the life of a gipsy, rising before the sun, and starting off with some of my allies who were old enough to take care of me, and returning home at sunset, I scarcely ever opened a book. I believe my aunt, and François, and Mr. Arundel kept any book that would have a charm for me out of my way; any intellectual excitement beyond what I was sure to gather in my walks abroad, they believed would be injurious just then. Every evening I returned exhausted, but after a good meal (how I enjoyed those simple meals!) I revived, and would relate the day's adventures to my aunt, as she reclined in her easy-chair, and I sat on a stool at her feet, within the influence of the warm glow from the great logs that crackled and flamed on the hearth; for the evenings, I remember, were chilly, and we loved to draw close to the chimney—my aunt and I. Sometimes Mr. Arundel sat with us; but not often. I saw him in his own rooms, in the daytime; and my aunt was often there then. In the evening, after the lamp came, I seldom saw Mr. Raby; he rarely entered my aunt's parlour in the evening. I used to wonder why he kept away from us. At one time, I fancied that perhaps the doctors had ordered him to go to bed very early. Then, by some chance, I discovered that he never went to bed till very late, and it came into my head that, as he was a great scholar, he might be studying at night,—perhaps writing a book;—a poem, or a treatise about the stars. As well as I can enter into that bygone state of mind now, I believe I really felt a secret pleasure in the mystery that hung over my idol—Mr. Arundel Raby.

This was the beginning of that blessed state of physical health which has never passed from me since; which I certainly never should have known had I been reared in a manufacturing city; and for which I would exchange no other gift of this earth; being well aware that, without it, all others are comparatively valueless to the possessor and to society. I can never be sufficiently thankful to those dear guardians of my childhood who took such judicious measures to make me, before all things, a physically sound creature. My mother was

too timid in her treatment, and had she lived, I should be at this day a wretched valetudinarian, I am told.—Sweet, fond mother! In whom education had not kept in check the errors of instinct. How many are there, even now, like to you! With the tenderest care sowing the seeds of a bitter harvest for your darlings. “Rise up, ye that be rulers and judges of the earth!” and if ye would have a nation of good and noble men, look well to the training of mothers. Leave *them* ignorant, weak, frivolous, and you will seek in vain for the men you would fain have spread abroad over the earth, instead of this race of semi-brutes, semi-vegetables, who imitate humanity so abominably!

One evening in the November of that year, I was sitting with my aunt before the cheerful fire as usual, and was telling her some adventure of the past day. I had risen from my stool to show her *how* Green, the keeper, had stood to shoot at a deer, when I stopped suddenly in the midst of my excitement, for there was a stranger in the room. The carpet was thick, and his footsteps had not been heard; he stood behind my aunt's chair, and watched me with eyes which I fancied I had seen before. Perceiving the change in my countenance, my aunt turned her head to see what I was looking at. In a moment she rose; and there was a pleasant smile in her face as the strange gentleman took her hand, and said:

“How do you do? I have taken you by surprise; but you will not mind that, I hope.”

“Not if you are alone.”

“My dear Miss Hastings, calm your mind. Banish all disquietude on the score of beds, sheets, and provisions! Lady Carleton and my daughters are far away. I have come down, *en garçon*, for a threefold purpose: to have a conversation with Arundel—to get a few days of peace—and another few days of war among the pheasants, before the rest come to disturb the house. There will be plenty of time for you to play the housekeeper a week hence. So sit down once more as you were just now, and let me go back twenty years.—How is it that you don't get old?” he inquired, glancing curiously at

her, as he sank, apparently fatigued, into a large chair beside her.

My aunt laughed. "You must excuse me if I do not receive compliments as prettily as you pay them. I am obliged to be uncivil enough to contradict you, for I feel that I am getting old."

"Ah! your countenance was always deceitful!" he replied, smiling again. "Even in those early days at the Rectory, yonder, when your father used to say, 'Margaret, you look as if you knew nothing about this lesson! Try if you can construe better than Lord Merle;' and you always construed rightly on purpose to spite me. Do you remember you were always 'Margaret' and I was always 'Lord Merle' when we were naughty? It was 'Meg' and 'Frank,' at other times. Ah, what would I not give now for one day—one long, long summer-day—of those old times!"

"Ah! if in after-life we could but gather  
The very refuse of our childish hours!"

You smile to hear me quote poetry! Politics give one a taste for poetry by the force of contrast. I always feel poetical at a Cabinet Council; especially when —— is prosing away, *more suo*. To return. You seem to have preserved the light and breadth of those old times still; they hang about you like the perfume of the attar when the precious drops have all been drained from the bottle. I cannot accept your contradiction; you do *not* get old—if to be old be to lose freshness of feeling, and that sunshine of the smile which comes only from the sun within the heart. How is it that you look so like the Margaret Hastings of twenty years ago?"

"I should say it is because you do not see very clearly by firelight. I am not decrepid, certainly; but I am no longer young." And my aunt laughed, as if there was nothing melancholy in the assertion.

"No longer young!" echoed the stranger, as he looked straight into the fire. "Tell me, is there any compensation in life for being no longer young?"

"Have *you* found none?" asked my aunt, looking at him

gravely. "You speak as if you really believed in that heresy of half-developed minds, that merely to be young, *i.e.*, half-developed, is the highest, happiest state of the human being. I have seen nothing so very desirable in my own youth, or in the youth of all those I love most, that I should mourn its loss. It seems the season for suffering, to all minds not contented with mediocrity and the amenities of commonplace."

"Ah, how one suffers in youth!" exclaimed the stranger, catching at a word, and continuing to speak as if half to himself. "It is terrible to think how the heart beat and swelled nigh to bursting then, for what seems such a trifle now. How exquisitely wretched men are at twenty! How they hug and dote on their despair! And what a vast amount of time they have to be miserable in! He is a lucky fellow who at forty has time for the luxury of woe. A man finds, then, that the swift hurry, the strong pressure of events, numb his feelings—he has not time, now, for sorrow. What was that I read the other day, quoted in some review? (I do not quite live on Blue Books and newspapers, Miss Hastings),—poetry that contains sound sense, on this very subject:

'He that lacks time to mourn, lacks time to mend.  
Eternity mourns that. 'Tis an ill cure  
For life's worst ills to have no time to feel them.  
Where sorrow's held intrusive, and turned out,  
There wisdom will not enter, nor true power,  
Nor aught that dignifies humanity.'

Still, I, for one, hold sorrow intrusive. Out she should turn from *my* quarters, bag and baggage, if I could have my will! No; I was not born for a philosopher, that's clear. I hate sorrow, even her very shadow, as much as I did when a boy! More than *that* boy does!" he continued, glancing round at me with his bright eyes. "Come here, youngster! So! you are not afraid of me?"—and he shook me by the hand.

"I know something about you. I saw your father two days ago. He tells me you are a good boy. When he and I were boys we were great friends, and so it is proper that you and I should be friends. Is it a bargain?"—and he smiled. "Oh, but you must not look so grave, if you are to be my friend.



I like my friends to laugh." Then turning to my aunt he said: "He is too serious. This great place is dull and gloomy to a child—when he is alone here; I remember that;" and he seemed to become gloomy.

"Have you dined?" asked my aunt, in the same tone as before.

"No!—yes!—that is—I beg your pardon, I dined on the road. And now I will wish you good evening, Miss Hastings. I can find my way to Mr. Arundel's apartments, I suppose?"

"Not without a light, I think," said my aunt. "If you will wait a minute, some one will attend you. Ring the bell, Frank."

I ran forward to do so; the stranger instantly moved in the same direction, and did what my aunt had requested. As we came in contact, he laughed again. "Ah, I remember—your name is Frank, too." Then, seeming to recover himself, he said to my aunt: "While I think of it, Miss Hastings, let me beg your acceptance of a bundle of new music they will find among my packages; perhaps you will let me hear some of it to-morrow. I suppose you play and sing a great deal always. Music helps to keep one young. What was that you were saying just now about 'a heresy of half-developed minds'? I am naturally heretical. I believe it is a good thing to be young, for no other reason than that one is young. There is an art in keeping young, independently of that practised to such perfection by a Frenchwoman *de trente ans*—the art which you at *quarante ans* practise equally well. Part of the secret lies in your keeping 'the cool sequestered vale of life.'"

"I think what you mean is simply this: that I live in a pure air, am well lodged, eat the best food, rise early, go to bed early, and lead a tolerably active life, with no undue excitements. These advantages I have had for years; as no one knows better than you."

"Ah! Temperance!—living face to face with nature! You ought to live for ever, and be for ever young, in such a mode of existence."

"It is the true *savoir vivre*, I believe," said my aunt. "Will you give your orders? Here is Susan."

"Ah! how do you do, Susan?" Susan dropped a profound curtsy, and said blushinglly :

"Very well, thank you, my lord. I hope your lordship is well, and my lady and the young ladies."

"We are all well, Susan. Tell Bennet to give you a bundle of music for Miss Hastings. Any room will do for me," he added, turning to my aunt. "I beg there may be no trouble about it to-night, as I come so late. Then I want some one to send François to me, here. And though I have dined, I should like to have a cup of coffee when I go up to Mr. Raby's room. What! are you going to bed, my little man?" And he patted me on the head. At a signal from my aunt, I was going to leave the room with Susan. "Good night! good night! I hope we shall see more of each other to-morrow. Your father and I were great friends."

As I went away, I asked Susan who that gentleman was, and was rather astonished to hear that it was the Earl of Carleton.

"Why, Susan, you told me that the earl and countess always came down here in such grand style, and that there was always a week's preparation before they came; that the furniture in the state-rooms was all uncovered, and the carpets put down; and here is the earl come just as if he were any other gentleman—like my papa. I think he has walked from the village, instead of coming with a carriage and four horses, as you said."

"Circumstances alter cases, Master Frank. My lord is an earl, and can do just as he likes, you know. He's not a bit proud, you see; and sometimes he likes to come down in a quiet way, and take us by surprise; and sits, quite affable, in your aunt's room, and says to me, 'Susan, how do you do?' But when my lady is with him they travel in style, I tell you. My lady has a fine spirit, and loves to have everything as a countess should have. When she is here, we all mind our ps and qs, you will see. My lord is very particular, too, some-

times. He ain't always as humble as he is to-night, but keeps up his dignity, and insists upon having the best and grandest of everything, as a nobleman should. Any way, he is a real fine gentleman—kind and good to everybody. I like him, with all his odd ways."

"I should like him better without them," said I.

The next evening a message came to my aunt from the earl, begging that she would send me to him and Mr. Raby for half an hour. I was immediately carried off by Susan to have some alteration made in my costume, which I considered quite unnecessary, having now arrived at that period when a boy looks upon dressing as an invention of the evil one.

"Why can't I go as I am?" I remonstrated. "What's the good of putting on a clean collar and all that rubbish?"

"Fie, Master Hastings!" exclaimed Susan. "Look at these dirty little paws! Are they fit for Mr. Raby or my lord to touch, do you think? Ah! you used to be a very nice clean little gentleman; you are quite altered since you have been allowed to go scampering about, and climbing trees, and getting into mud and dirt with all the tag-rag and bob-tail! I wonder your aunt allows it. I can't abear such ways! It ain't at all genteel. There you are, not minding a bit what I say! Now, stand still, there's a good boy, and let me comb out your hair. You never keep that tidy now. It's just as bad as any other young gentleman's; and it used to look as beautiful as print. Ah, Master Hastings, you are turning just like all other boys! Stand still, sir! There, now you look as a little gentleman should! Don't go flying along the corridor like mad; and, whatever you do, don't keep poking your tiresome little fingers up into your curls. They look very nice now." And she dismissed me with a kiss of approval for submitting to that most painful sacrifice of a little boy's life, the sacrifice to the Graces—and the kiss was followed by a sigh for my defalcation from my old habitual worship of that fair triad. She watched my progress along the south corridor, to make sure that I did not disorder my curls by running, and nodded kindly to me when I laid my

hand on the lock of the door which communicated with Mr. Arundel's apartments. Good Susan! She was rather more anxious about the visit I was about to pay than I was myself.

In the ante-room I found François musing over the fire. "Pauvre petit!" he murmured, as I went up to him; and he kissed me in his French fashion on both cheeks.

"I have come to see the earl and Mr. Arundel," I said; "they have sent for me. Am I to go in there?" and I pointed to the door of Mr. Arundel's study.

"Oui, oui, mon ami," he said softly, but so mournfully that I asked,—

"Is there anything the matter, François? Is Mr. Arundel ill again?" And I believe I turned pale with a vague fear of that unknown disease.

"Non, non! milor se trouve très bien. Vas, mon petit!—go to him. Je vais t'ouvrir la porte." He rose, and opening the door, I passed into the room.

My attention was immediately drawn to the two brothers, as they stood side by side before the fire. Now that I saw the earl divested of overcoats and attired in a dressing-gown of dark red velvet, which hung around him in ample folds, I was struck by the dignity of his appearance. He was a very handsome man, in the prime of life; but not much like his picture, except about the eyes. They still retained somewhat of their sunny, joyous light; but the other features were prouder, harder, stronger;—there was the look of a sovereign, it might be of a tyrant, in the haughty but refined upper lip. The face was capable of much variety in expression. Sometimes it was stern; at other times sad; often sarcastic; seldom tender; most frequently it wore that look of anxiety and care for some mere earthly interest which is so common among men of high station in the world; a look very different indeed from the grave and earnest one seen in the faces of men whose minds are habitually filled with lofty thoughts having nothing selfish for their basis. The Earl of Carleton had lived in and for the world, but he had a soul which the world could not satisfy; nor, in consequence, make entirely its own. He was

high in office, and honoured among men. His ambition grew by what it fed on; but I have seen him look, and that not seldom, as if he were saying to himself, "What profit hath a man of all the labour that he taketh under the sun!" But he never gave the thought words, and acted always as if it had never entered into his heart. He had the power to crush misgivings and regrets. Intellectually the Earl of Carleton was, if not a giant, a well-trained athlete, and delighted in exercise. He had a vein of humour, which came out occasionally in conversation. He was considered a good talker; and though, from all I can learn, he was given to contemptuous sarcasm against women, there was not a man in London more *fêlé* by them. Judging from my own observation, I should say that Lord Carleton had a natural liking for cultivated female society; at all events he shone brilliantly in it, for all his *poco curanteism*. His tastes were not simple, though he loved simplicity by way of change;—it then assumed the form of a luxury. Inactivity was not congenial to him, but sometimes he would take to idleness and repose, as a man surfeited with the taste of costly wines will call for pure water; but he is sure to go back to the wine again. Thus it was that Lord Carleton sometimes came down suddenly, and without any parade, to spend a few days at his ancestral seat, and took pleasure in putting up with inconveniences which, in general, he would think it impossible to submit to. He was a disappointed man. He had no son, and his brother had none.

One of the things that made me like Lord Carleton, long before I was old enough to make these observations on his character, was his strong attachment to his brother. The friendship between them was of a powerful and peculiar nature, and will be spoken of hereafter; but I remember being impressed by many evidences of it on the earl's part, during the evening which I am reverting to, but the memory of which is so painful that I shrink from it. As it was of importance to the story I have undertaken to relate, I must give the reader a brief account of what occurred then.

The two brothers stood side by side in front of the fire; looking very like their pictures I thought. Mr. Raby made a motion to me to approach; but I missed the usual smile in his face. He looked very grave—and so did the earl. I gazed wistfully up into Mr. Arundel's face. "There is something the matter," I thought. "He looked at me so when mamma——" I could not go on with the thought; my eyes fell to the ground, and I felt a mist come over them.

"Is he very sensitive?" I heard a voice say, as if in a dream. It was the earl who spoke. "Yes, poor child!" said Mr. Raby; and I felt myself drawn towards him. He had taken a seat. I tried to rouse myself, and stood still, waiting for what was coming; but I did not guess what it was.

"My dear child, you suspect—you feel that I have some bad news to tell you. Will you try and bear it like a brave boy? Will you help your aunt to bear it?"

I nodded my head quickly;—my fingers played nervously with a portion of my dress.

"Your dear father has been seized with sudden illness, and is dead."

"Dead!"—the word faded away in my throat, and I sank into Mr. Arundel's arms in a state of stupefaction. How long I remained thus I know not—probably some hours. I believe I slept.

On opening my eyes again, I saw a man sitting at a table, with his head bowed down upon his arms; his frame shook as if he were weeping. I looked again;—it was not Mr. Raby—it was the earl!—That proud, haughty, strong man was weeping. I heard a sob, which made my heart leap. "It is for my father he weeps!" I thought. "He said he was his friend!" There came another agonising convulsive sob. I had never seen grief so passionate. It awoke a yearning pity, and I felt that I must comfort him. There was no one else in the room. I rose, trembling with emotion, and creeping across the room, stood beside the mourner for a minute, not daring to breathe. Again came that awful sob. I could

contain my pity and sympathy no longer; but, putting my arms round his neck, I kissed his cheek, and spoke a few childish words.

"Don't cry so! Pray don't!"

He started as if an adder had stung him; and looked at me with pain-racked face. I flung myself passionately into his arms. "Don't send me away! Let me cry with you. You loved my poor papa!"

He pressed me to his breast. "God knows I did, my poor child! There! there! cry as much as you like. Never mind me. Poor young heart!" And he kissed me as affectionately as if I had been his own child. In a minute or two he was calm; all emotion disappeared, except that his lips were pale and his eyes haggard. I had attributed his grief to a single cause—the death of his friend. I know now that it had other and equally potent causes. In mature life our feelings and passions are seldom unmixed—they are strangely complicated, reminding the fanciful philosopher of those hybrid creations of former ages—sphinxes, and monsters, and chimeras dire. Like them they are more powerful and horrible than any simple terror or grief—tearing the soul many ways at each wound.

While Lord Carleton was trying to console me, and answering all my questions concerning the manner of my father's death (which need not be repeated here), Mr. Raby entered the room. There was a bright colour in his hollow cheek, and the eyes gleamed under their drooping lids. Immediately his brother rose, and putting me gently from him, advanced and took his hand. Mr. Raby raised his eyelids for a moment. They remained silent. At last the earl said, in a subdued voice, "How is she?"

"She is—there is no one like that woman, Francis! To see her as I have seen her, just now, would move the hardest men to love and pity! I envy James the sorrow she feels for him."

"Poor Margaret! Can anything be done for her?"

"No; she is alone now. I thought it best to leave her

awhile. I have promised to take the child to her presently. She bade me show you the letter which James dictated an hour before his death. There it is. You will see that it is such as to overcome all her scruples. To-morrow or the next day this matter must be attended to, as far as the legal part of it is concerned; for the rest, she says that it would be a satisfaction to her if you will tell her your opinion to-night."

"To-night? In her present state! Don't let her think of it to-night. It will excite her too much!" replied the earl, who had glanced over the letter.

"I think it may have a contrary effect. If she were to hear from your own lips that you do not object to my adoption of her nephew, that you approved of my choice, it would set her mind at ease. Her scruples are delicate, and very natural."

"Very natural in such a woman! I can see, too, that she would wish no time to be lost in the business, if it be to be done. We know not what a day may bring forth. Remember Morton's interest in this matter. The sooner the boy is made your legal heir the better."

"Your evidence and co-operation are necessary to ensure his right. My will is not good in law without your testimony you remember. I will have no chance of Morton's interference with the boy."

"He went on to speak of technicalities which I could not understand, though I knew they related to my being made his heir. My father's letter was in Lord Carleton's hand, as it hung down by his side. I felt an irresistible desire to press to my lips a paper which my dying father had touched. I bent my head and kissed it.

"Take it, my child," said Mr. Arundel. "You may read it if you can." While they went on conversing about wills and title-deeds I read that letter.

It made a profound impression upon me. It was addressed to my aunt, and contained an earnest entreaty that she would lose no time in complying with Mr. Raby's desire to make me his heir. He referred to a correspondence which had recently



taken place between them, and also to an interview he had had with his old friend, the Earl of Carleton, on this subject. He was now quite convinced that his former scruples were rather the result of pride than of prudence. Lord Carleton had expressed his determination to acknowledge and make good in law, the claims of any person whom his brother should desire to adopt as his heir. He had said that, as there were no sons in his own family, he would rather that his brother's choice should fall upon a Hastings than on any other. He had promised to support and assist the child of his old friend in his new position. As to Mr. Raby,—my father spoke with perfect confidence of his love for me, and with gratitude for all his intentions in my favour. He prayed that I might prove worthy of them—that I might be an honour to my new station. Above all, he hoped that I should never forget my duty to my own family; least of all, to her who now stood in the place of my mother. In after-years I studied that letter. At the time when I first read it I was so occupied with the sad thought of the writer's death, that I gathered only a very general idea of its meaning. I was to be Mr. Raby's *heir*; that was all I understood distinctly. Heir to what, I knew not. Heritage was nothing to me then, sonship was everything.

"Do you understand that letter, my boy?" asked Mr. Raby, when I had laid it on the table.

"Yes. Papa says I am to be your son, now. But what will become of Tom, and Lucy, and Harry? I want to see them. I want to be with them. Who will be their father, now?"

I was soon satisfied on this point. They were well taken care of, and I was to see them soon.

"May I go to my aunt?" I asked, with that longing which a sorrowful child always has to rest his head upon a woman's bosom. Those two men were very kind, but they did not caress me as my aunt would have done. She loved me as women only loved a child; she was weeping for my father, and I could weep with her. I was sent to my aunt. I sat

down on the little stool at her feet, laid my head in her lap, and, after awhile, cried myself to sleep. She sat in her chair before the fire, motionless.

I awoke with the sound of voices near me. The earl and Mr. Raby were talking with my aunt. It was about me : my being made some one else's son, and my own father was dead ! It seemed like disrespect to his memory. I did not like to listen to it. Presently my aunt lifted me in her arms, and laid me on that very sofa where my father had placed me the first night I came to Carleton Castle. That night returned vividly to my memory, and I fancied I heard my father's voice as I had heard it then, in conversation with my aunt. But *her* tones ! How different they were now ! When I looked at her face, and heard her voice, I saw how deeply she loved and mourned for my father. She sat at the table with the two brothers ; they spoke in low tones. The earl wrote something on a sheet of paper, and then my aunt wrote on it, and then Mr. Arundel. It was then folded and given to my aunt by the earl, who said, "That is settled, now. I will see Morton and the lawyers to-morrow. Are you quite satisfied ?" "I am. You are very good. God bless you both." And she stretched a hand to each.

Never were the hands of queen or saint kissed with more reverence than those of my aunt by the two brothers.

Henceforth I became the adopted son of Mr. Arundel Raby, and was heir to an estate worth, *now*, fifty thousand a year. This is all I need say about myself at present.

Subsequently I became acquainted with the entire history of the persons whom I have introduced to the reader in this autobiographic fragment.

Pascal says, "*La dernière chose qu'on trouve en écrivant un ouvrage est ce qu'on doit mettre la première.*" I have felt the truth of this saying on the present occasion ; and after much consideration, I determined to put first in my book what comes last in order of time—viz., my own connexion with the Raby family. By so doing I have introduced to my readers the chief characters of my story as they were introduced to me,

after the great struggles and sorrows of their lives were well nigh over. Those who are interested in what they have seen of Margaret Hastings and Arundel Raby, and are curious concerning their previous lives, will find an account of them in the following pages.

PART II.  
MARRIAGE AND BIRTH.



## CHAPTER I.

### MY GRANDFATHER'S FAMILY AND THE EARL OF CARLETON'S.

"Thou hast lived, my ancestor, well and happily; neither poor nor rich; learned enough; eloquent enough; ever with a sound mind in a sound body."

MARCUS ANTONIUS FLAMINIUS. *Trans. SOUTHEY.*

"It behoves the high  
For their own sakes to do things worthily."

BEN JONSON.

My grandfather, the Reverend Henry Hastings, Rector of Carleton, had been a school and college friend of the late Earl of Carleton (the father of the present earl and Mr. Arundel Raby), and they continued their friendship through life. In early youth, Henry Hastings was far more happily situated than his noble companion, for he was brought up in that "little heaven below," a numerous, intelligent, and affectionate domestic circle. With the young Viscount Merle it was very different. He was an only child, and the heir of large estates; but his home in childhood was wretched, and in boyhood he had no home at all. His father, Francis, fifth Earl of Carleton, was what all the world called a very strange man—an oddity. Some few who knew a little of his private life, said that he was the victim of an uncontrolled temper, a domestic tyrant, a misanthrope, a miser; those who knew him best, servants and persons who had been about him from childhood, said that he was not quite sane; and a few of the plain-speaking kind had been heard to say, that the Earl of Carleton was madder than many a man in Bedlam. He had had a gentle wife whom he killed with terror; and he had often frightened his child into fits; but he went about the world as if it were perfectly safe for the world that he should do so. Once, indeed, the countess's family endeavoured to protect her and her child, by procuring a commission of lunacy against him; but he showed then, that he was "only mad north-north-west." He controlled himself so well, that he was pronounced to be of sound mind; and his wife's relations were suspected by the world of conspiracy against him. From that time he showed

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a violent antipathy to his wife, whom he contrived to keep always under his own roof, by refusing to let her have her child if she went away. By a perversion of nature, common enough among insane people, his son became an object of suspicion and dislike to him. It was reported that he once attempted the boy's life in a fit of passion. It would be a useless and a revolting task to give any further particulars of the earl's domestic conduct. It remains an open question to this day, whether he was really insane or only very wicked.

On the death of his mother, the young viscount was sent to Eton. His father was glad to have him out of sight. He then shut up Carleton Castle and went abroad, where he was occasionally heard of by English travellers, as the hero of stories that made their hair stand on end.

The "wicked lord," as he was called, was miserly. This showed itself in various ways, but especially in his treatment of his son while at school and at the university. If it had not been for Lady Morton, his father's sister, the boy would often have been without decent clothing, pocket-money, or the common necessities of a gentleman's son. Lady Morton took a great deal of notice of her nephew, and he generally spent the vacations at her house. I believe I am not assigning to Lady Morton any more of the world's wisdom than is her due, when I say she was actuated to this line of conduct as much by policy as by real affection for her brother's child. Frederick, Viscount Merle, was heir to an earldom and 40,000*l.* a year. Though his father was a "horrid brute," "an undoubted madman," and the boy depended on her and Sir Joseph for many things besides golden "tips," yet the time would certainly come when he would be one of the best matches in England. Lady Morton had five daughters;—and having the gift of prevision on their account, was very glad to make family affection do double duty. She thought a little indulgence and a few guineas well expended on so promising a nephew. And what thought the young viscount? He thought his aunt and uncle were very kind, and he liked his pretty cousins; but he was a clear-sighted as well as an affectionate

boy; and their gay, worldly household, did not please him half so well as the home of his friend, Harry Hastings. There, he felt that he was loved for his own sake as well as for Harry's, and there he met with true and delicate sympathy for his misfortunes. For his mother's death and his father's conduct he felt to be heavy misfortunes; and he was early "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

When he was about eighteen he fell in love; not with one of his beautiful cousins, but with one of Harry Hastings' sisters. Strange to say, her parents decidedly disapproved of the connexion. They spoke to their daughter gravely on the subject, representing their reasons for this disapprobation. Against the young man himself they had nothing to say; they believed him to be noble, amiable, truthful, every way worthy to be Henry's friend; but against his marriage with one of their daughters they had two reasons to urge. First, they knew a great deal of the viscount's father, and firmly believed him to be insane. His disease, they expected, would show itself sooner or later in his son; or, passing over him, would reappear in his children. Secondly, they believed that a marriage in her own rank of life would be a happier one for their daughter.

The young lady did as her parents wished, and refused the viscount's hand, without assigning any reason. After that she never gave him any encouragement, and he believed that she was, and always had been, indifferent to him. His friend Henry held a different opinion. He believed that his sister was attached to the handsome young viscount; but being once convinced that it would be wrong to marry any one with a taint of insanity in his veins, she had set herself steadily to work to control her love, and, if possible, to destroy it. This was just what might be expected from a Hastings. The family was remarkable for strength and steadiness of principle. I never heard that we were, any of us, distinguished for genius, or learning, or personal beauty; but, as far back as our family records go, we have borne a character for high and inflexible integrity, and persistency in a conscientious course of conduct.

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My grandfather's sister was a remarkable instance of this ; for the viscount's passion seemed to strengthen with opposition, and she had to resist what almost every woman finds irresistible—a devoted and steady affection ; and this, too, from a graceful, intellectual man ; young, handsome, high-born, and able to place her in a lofty position in society, for which, I have often heard my Aunt Margaret say, she was very well fitted, being of a commanding appearance, clever, and ambitious. But, my great-aunt having sacrificed thus far to principle, indemnified herself for it by steadily refusing to listen to any other overtures of marriage. These, by that law of contraries which so often seems to sway human affairs, came to her more frequently than to any of her sisters ; but she died an old maid.

Her lover became Earl of Carleton in his four-and-twentieth year, and came into the possession of an immense fortune, in part the result of his father's hoarding. At this period, I believe, he made another proposal of marriage to my great-aunt, which she again refused ; after imparting, at his earnest entreaty, her reason for doing so.

For several years after that, the young earl lived in retirement at Carleton. His only associate there was my grandfather, to whom he had presented the living of Carleton, which was worth about seven hundred a year. The two young men lived together in habits of intimacy. They walked, rode, read, and worked together. My grandfather had a very high idea of the duties of a clergyman ; and the earl, too, had a notion, that large estates brought to their possessor many duties besides that of owning them.

My grandfather married after he had been settled at Carleton two years. The earl, to the astonishment of neighbours, tenants, and his fashionable kinsfolk, remained single till he was thirty years old ; when, after spending a season in London, he married his cousin, Miss Caroline Morton, and thus fulfilled his aunt's constant prediction, that "he would marry one of the girls after all." The lady displayed her new rank of countess with great splendour and gaiety, before the eyes of

the whole world of fashion in Rome, Paris, and London, and was then brought down to Carleton by her husband. She was by no means insensible to the grandeur of the castle; but she was also keenly alive to its dullness before very long. There was positively nothing to amuse her—"nothing to pass away the time—no opera, no balls, not a creature to speak to, *pas un chat de connoissance*," as she wrote to her sister. I have obtained possession of a packet of the old (then the young) countess's letters, and as I can just decipher the pale brown writing, I will select one or two extracts to lay before the reader, because they will put him in possession of a few facts connected with my grandfather's family at that time, and the state of affairs at Carleton. My Lady Carleton writes like "a woman of quality" (barring the spelling, which is correct), and not like a *femme savante*. She does not want for cleverness, however; her other qualities the reader may be left to discover for himself. About a month after her domestication at Carleton, she writes thus:

"CARLETON, July 179—

"DEAR BESSY,—So you are at Bath with all the rest of the world. Happy you! What a treasure of a husband! to carry you about just where you want to go. If my Lord Carleton—but he is a good sort of man in his way, I assure you, and is very kind to me; only, I wish he was not so monstrous grave, and would not talk to me so much about 'the duties of my position!' Just as if one were a prime minister, or a waiting-gentlewoman! He has the strangest notions for a man of his rank! He goes about among his tenants—over their farms and into their cottages—sometimes, I believe, he sits down and drinks beer with them. He walks about in the queerest dress you ever saw. I vow he looks no better than a farmer himself sometimes. I don't mean to say he dines or sits with me in that trim. No; he is not so bad as that.

"I would not mind all this, my dear, because nobody can mistake it for anything more than condescension on his part; and he does not expect me to follow his example; but what I

do mind, is his extreme intimacy with that clergyman and his family. I mentioned these people before. I foresaw they would be a perpetual torment to me, and so they are. I dislike to have people of that sort always about one. Not that they are disagreeable or ill-bred. I have no fault to find with them, but that my lord thinks them faultless, and holds them up (especially Mrs. Hastings) as a pattern to me. Now I always made a point of hating any one set up as a pattern to me, and accordingly I hated that woman the moment I saw her. As for Mr. Hastings, he is a very good man; admirably fitted for his profession. In short, I dislike the very name of Hastings (it's too good for a plebeian family), and if it were not for Frederick, who really is much attached to the man, I would not take any notice of his family beyond the formal visits which I am obliged to pay to all the small gentry and clergy in the neighbourhood. As it is, we go to the Rectory, or the Rectory comes to us, every day. We eat and drink, and walk and drive with the Rectory; we talk of nothing but the Rectory—if the Rectory family had been a woman, Frederick would have married it. Ah, now I must leave off, for there is the tall rector himself (he's a good-looking man, by the way), come to show me some plan for a school in the village, which, I believe, I am to have the credit of building, though I am shameless enough to confess to you that I care nothing for the thing, not even for having the credit of it.

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“When I left off yesterday to see Mr. Hastings' plan of the school-house, I dreaded his visit very much, for it was the first time I had been alone with him, and I knew Frederick was gone out on one of his benevolent missions for half the day. I do not think I was very gracious at first, but Mr. Hastings seemed to take no notice of that, but began talking on various subjects, as if he were determined to draw me out. I was not inclined to be drawn out; but he persevered; and, obstinate as I am, I was obliged to smile and be amused at his conversation, which was really very clever. To my surprise, I found that he had mixed a great deal with the world,

and knew everybody *celebrated* or distinguished in England and France. He told me some amusing anecdotes of Lady —, Mr. —, Mdme. de —, and W. S., which are better than anything of the kind I ever heard before. Then we talked of drawings and pictures, and he quite excited me to try and make sketches again. He says Frederick sketches capitally, and will be delighted to find me a willing pupil. Then came the plan for the school. I did not quite like the design, and pointed out something which could easily be improved. *That* seemed to please Mr. Hastings, and we went over the drawing together, criticising it—he, very well;—I, pertly and incoherently, after my fashion; and the end of *that* was that I undertook to make a copy of the design with my own additions and improvements. We both agreed as to the importance of having better music in the church; and to obtain this, he suggested that we should have a number of the village people taught singing in the school. This brought us to talk of music. On that, too, I found my gentleman well informed. He knew more about Paesiello, Bach, Handel, Purcell, and sacred composers generally, than I did; and I knew more about Glück, Cimarosa, Mozart, and the charming, charming opera composers; and as each wanted to know more of what the other knew most, we got on very well. I found he could sing;—indeed, he has a very good voice, and it is much more cultivated than mine. He asked me to sing a duet from Glück's 'Orpheus' with him; and I did so. As he sings so well, I enjoyed it very much. He seemed pleased with my voice, and begged for something else. We were trying with great animation the duet between Adam and Eve in Haydn's new oratorio, 'The Creation' (which Mr. Hastings does not quite like), when Frederick came in. I could not help laughing when I caught his eye, for I had declared at breakfast, that very morning, that I was afraid 'I never could get on with his very sedate friend the clergyman;' and at the same time I thought in my heart all the things against the whole tribe of Hastings which adorns the former portion of this elegant and interesting letter. Well, well! we women

are privileged to change our minds! What used papa to say whenever mamma gave way to second thoughts? Something about '*varium et mutabile semper*.' I am sure the sentence did not apply to *him*, good man, for he *invariably* said the same thing whenever she changed her plans or opinions. For my part, I hate to say, or do, or see, or hear the same thing over and over again. I like variety. So the *varium et mutabile* for ever! Perhaps, by way of another change, I may take to liking some more of the Hastings family. Good-bye for the present! I am going out to sketch with Frederick.

\* \* \* \* \*

"*Thursday*.—Positively these Hastings people have a witchcraft in them! Yesterday, after a long morning's sketching, Frederick and I were driving home, like Darby and Joan, in my pony phaeton, when we met Harry and James Hastings, two fine little fellows of eight and six years of age. 'Lord Carleton! Lord Carleton!' shouted the eldest; 'papa wants to speak to you. He has been up to the castle, and now he has sent us to meet you and ask you to come to him on your way home.' 'Very well, Harry. Here! jump up on this side; and you, James, get up on that. You won't mind the child sitting at your feet, my dear, will you?' Of course I could not *say* I did mind it; and so we rode with the two children perched at the bottom of the carriage, all through the village to the gate of the Rectory. I was rather amused at this whim of Frederick's, and perhaps I smiled at the children more than I had done before. This emboldened little James, who is a sweet, fair-haired, open-browed child; and leaning his chin on my knee, he looked with a sort of shy curiosity up into my face. I returned his look, and patting his cheek, said, 'Well, what do you think of me?' 'I think you are a very pretty lady,' he replied softly. This made me laugh outright. The child put his hand confidently into mine; when Frederick said, 'But, James, do you love people because they are pretty?' Looking at me once more, he lisped out charmingly, 'Yeth, I love everybody that ith pretty.' I kissed the child. He looked

so innocent and unconscious that he was saying something so very natural that he ought not to say it.

"I was persuaded to stay with Frederick and dine that day with Mr. and Mrs. Hastings.

"In general I am no admirer of your ornamental cottages; I like a large, handsome, substantial house; but this Rectory is a charming old place. It seemed very small to me, but Mrs. Hastings says that it is by no means a small house of its kind; that it contains twelve good rooms besides kitchen and offices, which is very well, I suppose, for a country clergyman's house. Nothing can be in better taste than the rooms I have seen. There is enough of the useful, enough of the luxurious, and enough of the purely ornamental, and not a bit too much of anything. I had noticed the elegance and comfort which pervaded the drawing-room when I called at the Rectory before; but its beauty struck me more than ever after dinner, when Mrs. Hastings and I left the gentlemen. The glass-doors leading into the garden were thrown open, the setting sun illumined every object in the room—chintz-covered easy-chairs, the very epitome of comfort and cleanliness, stood invitingly in the most desirable places—the pianoforte was open and strewn with music; books and needlework were on the tables; statuettes and flowers in vases adorned various parts of the room. A delicious perfume of roses and lilies was wafted in from the garden; the sound of children's voices and their careless laughter came thence, also, and the two boys and their little sister Sophia were seen sporting with a greyhound on the lawn.

"This is a sweet place, Mrs. Hastings! I exclaimed, in a tone of genuine admiration.

"You think so?" she said, turning to look at me.

"I do, indeed. You must not suppose that I am incapable of appreciating beauty and taste out of a large castle or a fine house in London." And I took a seat beside her, and was determined to be at ease with her. "I like your house, and your children, and your husband," I continued, "and if you have no objection, I am going to like you. You must give me a little

time first, because my husband has contracted the unfortunate habit of pointing you out as a model to me.'

" 'Say no more,' she interrupted, with a hearty laugh. 'I see we shall be friends. I am very glad of this; because I had almost given you up as a hopeless, unmitigated fine lady. This made me very sorry, because we are so accustomed to consider Lord Carleton as one of ourselves, that we could ill bear the idea of not loving his wife. We look to Lady Carleton for help in our public duties, and for kindness and sympathy in our home circle. The lady of the castle is the most important personage for ten miles round next to the lord.'

"In a few minutes I found myself confiding all my little troubles to Mrs. Hastings. To be candid, though, I must confess that she appealed to my weak point by saying, 'We are equals in birth, Lady Carleton. You are a baronet's daughter, and so am I.' From that moment I respected her as my equal in rank, and I soon saw that she was my superior in everything else. A more elegant-looking woman, in spite of the simplicity of her dress, I have never seen.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I asked Frederick to-day something about Mrs. Hastings. (She has been spending the morning with me, and helping me to order the baby-linen I shall want.) Who do you think she was? That daughter of Sir James Darlington, whose marriage he never forgave. I remember hearing about it when I was in the school-room. Don't you recollect the long talk you and I had with Miss Price about it? When we asked her if it was right to marry for love without the consent of parents, and the poor thing coloured so that we both felt sure that she had been in love herself at some remote period of her life. I wonder what has become of her, by the way! She must be old now. She might be glad of a home. I am sure there are plenty of rooms in this great rambling place if she would like to come and live here. I should like to have her kind ugly face about me again; it would look like old times. Besides, I think she might be very useful in helping me to manage the servants; and Frederick is very anxious I should have some

person with me above the condition of a nurse. I shall speak to Mrs. Hastings about it.

"Tell mamma not to be uneasy about me next month. I really can do very well without her—much better than I did before, in Rome.

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## CHAPTER II.

### MORE OF MY LADY CARLETON'S LETTERS.

"A creature not too bright or good  
For human nature's daily food."

WORDSWORTH.

"It is a long time since I wrote to you, dear Bessy. In the interval how much has happened to me! I have become the happiest mother in the world. My two boys are models of health and beauty, Mrs. Hastings says. Frederick is happier than I ever expected to see him. Though they are twins, they are not very much alike, except in size; which nurse says is not common, one child being generally larger and every way handsomer than the other.

"Allow me to introduce your nephews. Francis, Viscount Merle (it seemed so funny to give a little helpless creature so grand a name!) is just a quarter of a hour older than his brother, Master Arundel Raby. He is a quieter and better-tempered child, too; but Arundel has such extraordinary dark blue eyes, and such a quantity of silky hair on his little head, that he is at present a wonderfully beautiful baby. I hope he won't grow up ugly. I have heard that pretty babies sometimes grow up ugly. However, Mrs. Hastings says that they much oftener grow up pretty.—I must leave off, now, for the children want me.—Oh, let me say 'thank you,' for hunting up dear old Miss Price. She is quite a treasure to us. Frederick says we must have been the stupidest girls in the world not to have seen that she was a very superior woman. He declares that *he* found it out the very first holidays he spent with us. You know she was always very kind to him."



More than a year after this date I find the following :

"DEAR BESSY,—I have been making myself useful. I dare say you doubt my ability to do anything of the kind; but it is true. I happened to be spending an evening with Mrs. Hastings about a month ago, when she was taken ill. We had been expecting her confinement for several days, therefore everything was ready. The nurse was in the house; and I sent off directly for the doctor and Mr. Hastings, who happened to be in the village. Before either of them arrived, Mrs. Hastings was safely delivered of a fine girl. I washed and dressed it, and was so unwilling to leave it and its dear mother that I got Frederick to let me stay for a week at the Rectory. My own boys were brought to see me every day by Miss Price. It was the funniest thing in the world to see the two sturdy little fellows looking at the baby. Frank was quite jealous, and did not like me to kiss it. Arundel, on the contrary, kept close to it, watching it open and shut its eyes, with the intensest curiosity; and whenever the little creature put out its soft pink fists, and struggled about—as if it were not satisfied with existence—Arundel would put his little brown hand over the little pink one, and smile in the little pink face, and utter his sweet cooing, '*Poor, poor!*' as is his habit, when he loves or pities anything very much. I suppose my little Arundel will grow into a *bon père de famille*, and Frank into a baby-hater.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Did I tell you that I had settled in my own mind that I would be godmother to Mrs. Hastings' little girl?—I had; and I sent to London for a magnificent gold mug, and gold-mounted coral, and some beautiful lace robes, such as I should have for a girl of my own, and I had my own name wrought upon everything, as I intended the little thing to be called after me. I remember I ended your letter somewhat abruptly, that I might go and superintend the unpacking of a box from town containing these things. As I went to my room, I peeped into dear Miss Price's, and insisted on dragging her with me to see 'something I wanted her opinion about.'

I had kept the thing secret even from her and Frederick. She was very much pleased with the beauty of the presents, but she said they were scarcely suitable for a clergyman's daughter; that if I had spent a fourth of the money in finery, and put the rest of it out at interest for the child, to accumulate till she was twenty-one, it would have been more judicious. I laughed at what I called her 'poverty-stricken notions,' and asked her whether she expected that little Miss Hastings was one day to become a *governess*?—She replied that it was probable—that it was, indeed, more than probable that she might. There was every likelihood that she would be one of a numerous family, and that Mr. Hastings' living would not enable him to provide a competence for them all, after his death. I had never thought of this; and as I looked at the magnificent robes and the golden coral that were fit for a princess, I saw that I had been, as Price said, *injudicious*. This vexed me; for it was but the day before I had boasted to Frederick that my judgment was fast maturing; that I should never do absurd things, upon impulse, any more. I suppose I looked cross; for Price said soothingly,—

"'Never mind, my dear. It is done now; and as you have had your name put on all these things, I suppose it can't be undone. You have told Mr. and Mrs. Hastings of your wish to be sponsor?'

"'No,' I said; 'I wished to surprise them by sending these things down with a little note I have written on the subject.'

"'Are you quite sure, my dear, that Mr. and Mrs. Hastings have no engagement with some relation of their own to be the other godmother? They have this day asked me to be one.'

"'You? Why not *me*? ' I asked, hurriedly.

"'I do not know why they wish *me* to be godmother to their child; but I think I know one reason why they would not ask *you*.' And she pointed to the handsome christening presents before us. 'Mr. and Mrs. Hastings are not mercenary people. By asking the Countess of Carleton to be godmother to their little girl, they feel that they would be

asking a handsome present for her. They know your lavish generosity. It would make them uncomfortable either to be made the objects of it in this way, or to have to reject it. Can you not put yourself in their place, my dear child? You will then see how natural, how necessary, how commendable is this sort of pride in their case.'

"I saw the truth of what she said, and was very much annoyed at it. Presently I asked her whether she saw any impropriety in my going down to ask Mrs. Hastings to allow me to be the child's godmother; for my heart was set upon the thing, and I can't bear to be baffled. Miss Price said 'No;' and offered to go with me. I drove down to the Rectory. At the gate we saw Frederick's groom holding his horse; and as we entered the house Frederick himself was coming out. He looked so pale that I stopped him to inquire if anything was the matter. He replied hurriedly, as if he were thinking of something else, 'No; oh, no. I may have to go to town for a week or ten days, that is all.' Then, as he passed on to the gate, he turned his head over his shoulder to me and said, 'Don't wait dinner for me to-day.' There was something in his manner which seemed to say, 'Ask me no questions. My mind is troubled, but you cannot relieve it.' I remembered how Henry looked when he lost that money at Newmarket; and vague thoughts of betting, racing, and gambling losses flashed through my mind. I sprang after him, and laid my hand on his arm.

"'Frederick! have you lost much?' I whispered.

"'Lost!' he exclaimed, in a hoarse voice, and with such a look in the eyes that I verily believe he was mad at the moment! In such a state I feared he might go and do something desperate; as men often do after losing money to a great amount. So, I spoke softly—

"'Yes, *lost*. Never mind, dear, how much you have lost. I can make it up to you. There is North Ashurst—the great estate in Yorkshire which Uncle Bernard has left me, you know.'

"I could not understand the changes that came over his face as he looked at me. However, the expression gradually

softened, and he smiled affectionately, and patted the hand that lay on his arm; his face all the time was flushed, and there was a tear in his eye as he stooped down and said:

"God bless you, my little wife! Don't be afraid! I have not been gambling. Any loss I experience in life you will make up, dear; not out of your estate, but out of your love. There is nothing the matter."

"Then you will be back to dinner?"

"Yes. I will be back." And he rode off.

"When he was out of sight I went into the house with Miss Price. We found Mr. and Mrs. Hastings together in the drawing-room. They both looked graver than usual, I thought. I asked to see the baby. It was brought down, and very sweet and lovely it looked.

"Have you decided on a name?" I inquired, as I was nursing it; being anxious to arrive at the object of my visit.

"Oh, yes! *that* was decided before she was born," said Mrs. Hastings. "It has always been our wish that our second girl should be named *Margaret*, after Henry's sister."

"Margaret!" I repeated. "Oh, I don't like that name!"

"Don't you?" said Mr. Hastings. "We all think it beautiful. What name would you like us to give your little pet?"

"To tell the truth, I was in hopes you would let me be one of the sponsors, and that you would call her *Caroline*, after me," I said at once; for you know how impatient I am; that I can never bear to delay anything. I was glad to see that both Mr. and Mrs. Hastings looked pleased at this. The latter said:—

"My dear Lady Carleton, you are very kind to think of this, and we should have liked it very much, but that we have already engaged two sponsors in whom we have great confidence—women who have had more experience in the moral training of young people than you have had yet," she added with a smile; "and we are not of those who understand the act of appointing sponsors in baptism as a mere form. It might not be convenient or possible for a person in

your position to perform the important duties of godmother to an orphan child in the station in which this little one would be at our death. On this account, then, and also because the other two ladies have each kindly consented to undertake the office, I think you must not "promise and vow" anything in the name of this child, except in the depth of your own kind heart. There, if you will register a promise to befriend her, if it is ever in your power to do so, you will make me and her father the happier; for we are not insensible to the advantages which your powerful support may be to her some day when we are gone.'

"Miss Price then spoke in her quiet little voice. 'My dear madam, if you will allow me to resign my office in favour of Lady Carleton, I think it would be well. I am an old woman, and may not live to see the dear child grow up. Besides, I think you ought to know that Lady Carleton has for a long time meditated proposing this to you; and has thought very seriously of *some* of her duties as godmother.' You know what a grave way she has of saying little satirical things. I was about to interpose a word, but she waved me aside with her thin hand, and I know she always means to have her own way when she does that; so I subsided into silence, as I used to do in the old schoolroom.

"She had her own way this time, and settled to the satisfaction of all parties, that I was to be godmother in her place; and that the little darling is to be called Margaret Caroline.

"Frederick came home to dinner looking quite himself again. I talked away in very good spirits about our visit to the Rectory, and my little god-daughter, for I could not ask him any questions about the business which troubled him, as Miss Price dined with us. He seemed to listen attentively to what was said, but he asked no questions. At length I asked,—

"'Do you know why I hate the name of Margaret?'

"'No,' he replied.

"'Because I have found out that you like it better than any other woman's name, and it is not mine. But never

mind that now. Do you know this sister of Mr. Hastings ?'

" 'I know all Hastings' sisters ; but I have seen less of this one than of the rest of late years.'

" 'Is she handsome ?'

" 'I don't know,' he replied. 'Are the children coming down to-day ?'

" 'I saw he wished to turn the conversation, but I had my reasons for not turning it just yet. 'Yes, they are coming. Frederick, if I am godmother to this child, I should like you to be godfather.'

" 'Don't think of such a thing,' he said, hurriedly and decidedly.

" 'Why not ?' I inquired.

" 'In the first place, I cannot be godfather to this girl. I hardly know the catechism myself. In the next place, I am obliged to be off to London to-morrow morning, and shall have to stay there a fortnight at least.'

" 'Then you will see nothing of Miss Hastings, my lord,' said Miss Price ; 'for she is coming to-morrow evening, and returns home in a fortnight.'

" 'Now, Bessy, I am not generally suspicious, but I confess that I ceased to have fears about my husband's pecuniary losses from that moment, and began to entertain some of a very different nature. How they came into my head it is vain for me to try to discover ; there they are, and I cannot get rid of them ; at least, not until I have seen this Margaret Hastings. I do not remember that he ever spoke to us of her. Harry Hastings, and Tom, and Catherine we used to hear of frequently when he was a boy ; but Margaret we never heard of. However, it would be excessively foolish in me to make myself uncomfortable about it, even if I should find that he once had a fancy for her. It is *not* true that '*l'on revient toujours à ses premières amours*,' especially when one has a pretty and a tolerably obedient wife and two such children as my lovely boys."

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## CHAPTER III.

## THE PORTRAITS OF THE COUNTESS CAROLINE.

"Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,  
Quick as her eyes and as unfixed as those."

*Rape of the Lock.*

"She was a woman in her freshest age,  
Of wondrous beauty and of bounty rare;  
With godly grace and comely personage  
That was on earth not easy to compare."

*Fairy Queen.*

"Her eyes are homes of silent prayer,  
Nor other thought her mind admits."

*In Memoriam.*

THE reader has, I dare say, come to the same conclusion with regard to the Countess of Carleton that I arrived at when I had read thus far in the old, worn letters—viz., that she was of a higher nature than she seemed, or than she believed herself to be. It was clear that her fashionable education and worldly-minded associates had not been able to spoil her good disposition. I must not forget that I had better means of forming this opinion than the reader, because I read the whole of these letters many times, and found indications of character in those portions which are not set down here, because they have nothing to do with my present story.

There was a full-length portrait of this lady, styled in the catalogue of pictures at Carleton Castle, "*Caroline, wife of Frederick, sixth Earl of Carleton,*" by Gainsborough, that hung over the mantelpiece in my aunt's bedroom. In this she looked very pretty, and decidedly coquettish. She was painted in a court-dress. Ostrich feathers, a train, diamonds, and the usual paraphernalia seemed to sit on her with a careless and half-mocking, rather than with a stately air. This was painted just after her marriage; and I believe the artist has contrived to give the character of the woman.

There were two other portraits of the "*Countess Caroline,*" as she was generally called. They were not so valuable as works of art as the one just spoken of; but I have been

assured, by many persons who knew her, that they were good likenesses. If it be so, no one could say of the countess that she had "no character at all." It would sound much more like the truth to say that she had three distinct characters, so unlike were these three pictures, and yet each was so full of individuality. The second picture represents her with her two infant sons. An exquisitely touching look of motherly love animates her pretty face.

The third picture hung in Mr. Arundel's chamber in my childhood. In this, the features looked worn and almost colourless, with the exception of the lips, which retained a tinge of their old generous red, and the dark mark under the eyes, which gave them almost a luminous appearance as they glanced out from beneath the well-bent brow. In this picture the eyes of the countess are like those of her son Arundel, and there is a general resemblance to him in the face. She wears a black dress, and a white lace cap shades her thin face and confines the hair, once black, now fast turning to grey. She sits upright, but it seems as if it were an effort to do so. The small delicate hands are folded in her lap; the mouth is firmly closed, and the corners have a painful expression; the eyes look out straight before her; they are still and calm, with an uncommon mixture of keen intelligence and gentle resignation. Though in the countess's latest portrait there was much sorrow, there was no remorse—no self-upbraiding. You felt that she had not been the cause of her own grief—that whatever it was it came from without, and not from within. There was nothing of self in the sadness—no self-absorption—no self-tormenting. This gave her countenance its dignified calmness and resignation.

I will now give some particulars of the Lady Carleton's life subsequently to the events already described. The reader will then be able to judge how far the great change in her appearance may be accounted for. I have ample materials in the form of old journals kept by my grandfather and others, and letters from members of his family, as well as from the earl himself to various persons; besides the very exact oral



testimony of my Aunt Margaret as to what she herself saw and heard; but it is still from that bundle of the countess's letters to her sister Bessy, who seems to have been her habitual confidante, that I must continue to make extracts for some time. This seems to me the most satisfactory way of telling what there is to be told—the countess being given to a love of detail in her letters, almost Richardsonian. We return, therefore, to the time of my Aunt Margaret's christening.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE RECTOR'S SISTER AND THE CHRISTENING.

“Inured to any hue  
The world can cast; that cannot cast that mind  
Out of her form of goodness, that doth see  
Both what the best and worst of earth can be.”

DANIEL.

“I HAVE nothing to entertain you, my dear Bessy, but a gossip about the christening of my little god-daughter; and as you have seen many christenings, and found them all very much alike, I dare say, you shall be spared a full, true, and particular account of this one. But perhaps you are curious about my partner in the sponsorship. As she is the object most in my thoughts this morning, I will talk to you about her. I did not see her until yesterday, the morning of the christening. It was to be a grand gala day for all the children; and my two boys, with their nurses and Miss Price, went to join the little Hastingses before I drove over to the Rectory myself. We were all to walk thence to the church; Mr. Hastings will not hear of baptizing a healthy infant in a house.

“I was in the drawing-room alone, waiting for Mrs. Hastings, when the door opened, and a lady I did not know entered. She did not see me at first, and advanced to a work-table that stood by the open window. She sat down; and I did not move, for I wished to examine her unnoticed,

feeling quite sure it was Mr. Hastings' sister. She is very like him. She is a tall, elegant-looking young woman; indeed, a very striking figure. Her face is not handsome; the features are too strongly marked, and she is much too sallow. Still there is something very agreeable in the expression of her face when she speaks; the eyes beam out with such a soft melancholy kindness. When she is at rest I do not know that I quite like the expression; it strikes me as being unnaturally calm, as if she took strong measures with herself not to show any feeling. However, it does not affect everybody in this way. Miss Price says, that Miss Hastings' face, when she is not speaking, reminds her of a lake she once saw in Scotland, where the water was so deep, and the shelter from the wind so complete, that there was never a ripple on its surface. I think her face is like a lake, too, but a frozen one, seen by moonlight. Her whole manner is rather subdued, than what one calls soft or gentle. She speaks in a clear, steady voice, that never falters. I do not think she has so much feeling as Miss Price gives her credit for. She is thought very much of by her brother, I can see; and to him her manner is really affectionate. I fancy Mrs. Hastings is a little afraid of her. Cold and reserved people always throw a little gloom wherever they go. They may be very estimable, but to my thinking they would be a great deal more so if they would take a little pains to make their manners agreeable. We impulsive, warm, social people are constantly being dragooned by them into the suppression of our feelings. I may not be an impartial judge, but it seems to me that there is quite as much unhappiness caused in the world by your very correct prudent people of principle as ever *nous autres*, indiscreet folks, cause by our impulsive actions. But if I had had the making of my own faults, I would have erred on the safe side; so that other people should suffer from them instead of myself. I might lower the thermometer wherever I went, but I should only be the more respected. Ah, Bessy! joking apart, we English are solemn simpletons, when we might be merry and wise. How absurdly we try to check impulsive,

sympathetic natures in our children, and erect our national vice of dreary reserve into a cardinal virtue. I mean to inculcate cheerfulness and gaiety upon my boys as the highest moral excellence.

"Don't think that all this is *à propos* of my new acquaintance. No. She does not throw cold water over you by her presence; she is not conspicuously silent when other people are talking in a frivolous style, as many would-be wise folks are—forgetting that it is '*une grande folie de vouloir être sage tout seul.*' She converses easily and cleverly. I can imagine that in a thoroughly congenial society she would be very brilliant. I say *congenial*, for it was clear to me that though she was quite at ease and contented with our company at the christening yesterday, yet she was not in her proper element. I felt that she was superior in mental vigour and culture to Mrs. Hastings and myself. She never said a common-place thing; and no one else present said anything at all sensible or witty but she capped it with something better; and this without an effort or apparent consciousness of superiority. I never saw any one whom I think less likely to be ill-natured or satirical, and I would rather leave my character in her hands than in those of half my acquaintance. It is the judgment of little minds I fear, not that of great ones: and whenever I make a fool of myself, I hope it may be before a very wise person—like Miss Hastings. Miss Price wonders whether she will ever write a book, and says she thinks it would be worth reading. I do not think she will marry; yet she is not more than thirty, and is good-looking. I have made up my mind that no man will fall in love with her *now*. I dare say she was different ten years ago.

"It was a pretty sight, the drawing-room at the Rectory on the morning of the christening, when we were all assembled to go to church. Mrs. Hastings looking her handsomest, and Mr. Hastings, looking gentle and stately in his surplice, stood in the middle of the room caressing a group of children—really beautiful children—their own three and my two, who were all allowed, as a great treat, to go to church and see the

baby christened. The excitement of the five was a little subdued by the solemnity of the occasion and the idea of church, but they were all very animated. Arundel was by far the quietest though; for he seemed much occupied with Miss Hastings, and stood staring at her with his finger in his mouth. She, in her turn, bestowed much attention on him and his brother; if I may judge by the way in which she looked from one to the other, as she sat arranging a nosegay for me. She took very little notice of them in any other way, —asked no questions about their age, or anything else connected with them. I do not think she kissed, or took them by the hand, or played with their pretty curling hair; which, I confess, rather surprised me, as most people are apt to fall into raptures at the first sight of these children; for, to say the truth, though they are my own, it would not be an easy thing to find two such beautiful boys. They have such winning ways, too, that it is pleasant to most persons to take them in their arms. However, it did not seem so to Miss Hastings. I thought it odd, and began to fancy I should positively dislike her. I hate a woman whose heart does not soften towards children. There she sat quietly arranging those senseless flowers, while that lovely animated blossom, my Arundel, stood looking at her, the very picture of pretty infantine curiosity and bashfulness. She went on conversing with me about some book we had chanced to mention, and seemed scarcely to be aware that the child was watching her, except that now and then I saw her glance furtively at him, and then look back to her flowers. As no notice was taken of him, the child began to approach us; when he had crept within half a yard of her chair, Miss Hastings rose, and retreating towards the open window, said rather quickly—‘I must gather another sprig of jessamine!’ and passed into the garden. In a moment I lost sight of her. So it seems did the child, for he ran to the window, in his pretty fashion, to look after her. I was curious to see what he would do. He soon got outside, as if in pursuit of the object of his curiosity, and disappeared from my sight. Fearing lest he might fall, I

stepped through the window to look after him. I could not see him for a moment, on account of a large shrub. I was about to go round it, when I caught sight of something white on the other side of the shrub. It was Miss Hastings' dress. I stopped, and looking again through the branches, saw her apparently kneeling; and with my pretty Arundel clasped in her arms. She did not spare caresses *then*; she kissed him many times, and put back his curls that she might examine his face the better. Presently she looked quickly over her shoulder, as if she feared that she might be seen from the window, and then stood upright. I drew back within the room, for I had an indefinite feeling that she would be vexed if she knew that I had seen her caress the child. In a few minutes she returned, looking as composed as before, with some more flowers, leading Arundel by the hand, and carefully guiding his steps. He did not leave her when she sat down again, but stood by, looking first at her face and then at her flowers, in open-eyed amazement. I never saw the child so occupied by a stranger before. Nothing diverted his attention till the baby made his appearance. All the other little ones immediately surrounded the nurse with entreaties to be allowed to look at it, and he joined them. Miss Hastings and I watched this group while Mrs. Hastings was receiving Mr. and Mrs. Grey, of Langford Grange. The gentleman was to be Frederick's proxy as godfather. In a short time Mr. Hastings announced that it was time to go to the church, and now,—I will spare you all description of the ceremony.

"At dinner I sat next Miss Hastings, and we spoke of London society. I was often astonished at the things she said. Of course one is accustomed to a clever, satirical, semi-philosophic view of fashionable society; there is nothing extraordinary in *that*. Miss Hastings *can* take that view, too, I dare say; but I can see that it is not habitual to her. She seems to have enlarged and deeply-fixed opinions on all the most important things in this life.

"I hope you do not feel abhorrence of all those persons who are unfortunate enough to have no steady principles of action?" I said.

"She replied (evidently without thinking of me), 'No; I only feel pity for them, and sometimes contempt.'

"Then," said I, 'you never could make a friend of a person whose actions were guided by impulse.'

"No person acts only from good impulses," she replied. 'If there were a human being who did right instinctively, always, as the swallow builds her nest, I might feel reliance on his actions, as on a law of inanimate nature. It would be convenient, I grant; but I could not respect his mind as I must respect that of my friend. I would choose a friend who might sometimes do wrong from an error in judgment, or from a temporary weakness of will; but he must hold *this* doctrine,—that in all human conduct we should submit ourselves to the law of conscience, and do the right for no other reason than because it is the right. I should expect of my friend that he would act upon this doctrine.'

"And if your friend should disappoint your expectations, and, in some important act of life, do the thing which his conscience did not approve? If he should be led by passion to set at naught his moral principle, would your friendship cease?" I asked that question earnestly, for, to say the truth, it has often puzzled me.

"Without any hesitation, in a calm, clear voice, as if her mind were long settled on that point, she replied, 'If it *could* cease then, I should be convinced that it never had been a real friendship. Forsake my friend because he erred! I should as soon think of forsaking his bedside because he had the small-pox.'

"Many people would argue that it was right to do both!" I said.

"I believe they would; but what of that? I am a little surprised to hear Lady Carleton give weight to such an authority? "Many people!" and a droll, little smile curled her lip. 'Pray how many people may your ladyship have the good fortune to know whose arguments upon the duties of friendship you would consider worthy of serious attention?'

"About half a dozen," I replied. It took me a very short time to calculate.

“‘And of that half-dozen is there one who would recommend you, for *your own* sake, to turn from another because he had erred?—If so, you will find no friendship in that man. He does not know what it is. Be sure that for *his own* sake he would forsake you when you, in your turn, stumble in the rough and perilous paths of life. This man may be estimable in many things—honest and truthful (as far as he can see and feel truth)—anxious to do right, too—as far as he is able,—a good and useful man. But he is not capable of friendship. He would not even recognise the fundamental characteristics of this rare blessing of human nature—self-sacrifice and generosity. What he means by friendship is what I, borrowing a term from a new school of philosophy, call “enlightened self-interest.”’

“‘I do not quite understand. Of course you do not allude to mere time-serving, worldly friendships? You do not speak of people who keep what they call their *friends* as long as they can be useful to them in making their way in the world? Nor can you be speaking of those friendships of circumstance, in which people, being much together, get accustomed to each other, and are *friends* as a matter of course.’

“‘No,’ she said; ‘I speak of a bond of union somewhat higher than these. There is a sort of friendship which has much that is pure and good in it, but which has self-interest in loving, instead of unconscious self-forgetfulness, as its main-spring. A man, anxious for his own moral well-being, sees qualities that he admires in another,—qualities that he would like to acquire or to increase in himself; he sees enough of this other to approve his conduct, his views in life, his general purposes and aspirations. He feels happy when he is with him, and has his best powers exercised then. Therefore, he says, “It is good for me to be here. This is the person I will make my friend.” Mark! His argument is, “It is good for *me*—for *my* moral improvement—to be here.” Not “Here is goodness! I must be where it is, that I may see it always. It is so lovely!” That is what I call *enlightened self-interest*. I have nothing to say against it; only it is *not* friendship. It

is quite right that we should put ourselves always, if possible, in a healthy atmosphere—our minds as well as our bodies. We should avoid the society of those who would have an evil influence, for the world-old reason, which the Apostle Paul states in so compendious a form that the shortest memory retains it—"Evil communications corrupt good morals." A friend must belong to that class of congenial and respected associates, but he must have something peculiar in his effect upon us, which the others need not have. Friendship is a spontaneous feeling—a passion—not the effect of calculation, any more than love. We love our friends (those of us who *can* love a friend) partly in the same way that a man loves a woman—with a faith and a passion consonant to reason, but not consciously directed by it.

"She paused, not as if she had exhausted herself, but as if she feared she had said enough. I wished to hear her further, and said—

"'You say, "those of us who *can* love a friend," and "in the same way that a man loves a woman."—Do you not think there are many who love a friend? And does a man love a woman better than a woman loves a man?'

"'In the first place,' she replied, 'I believe that friendship is a very rare passion—very much rarer than love; that very few people *can* love a friend, while many can love a mistress or a wife very well indeed. As to a man's love for a woman, I said *that*, rather than a woman's for a man, because in general women's love for men is only gratitude—it is not a spontaneous passion as the other is. But we have got to that subject which is said to be the end of all conversation among young women, married and single!—Suppose we change it.'

"'As you please; only you must talk to me more about friendship when we have an opportunity. Tell me one thing now. Have *you* a friend?'

"A slight flush came over her face, a blush of pleasure, as she said, softly, 'Oh, yes. It would be dreary, indeed, to live without a friend! I am rich; I have two friends.'

"'Are they men or women?'



“‘They are men. One is my brother Henry.’

“‘Did you not form other friendships, or what you called such, when you were a girl?’

“‘Oh, yes. I believe I was given to forming attachments of that kind.’

“‘And you found that you had made a mistake? You must have suffered a good deal on those occasions.’

“‘I suffered intensely. The word is strong, but it is appropriate. In youth we are apt to do all things with our whole might. So I grieved over my false friendships. But this good has come out of that experience;—I know a true friend when I have found one, and I do not expect perfection in him; I am contented to like people instead of loving them; and I have learned to think deeply about friendship, and to value it more than any blessing on earth.’

“‘More than love?’ I asked in amazement.

“‘Love!’ and there was a slight contraction of the eyebrows. ‘That I have nothing to do with.’

“‘Pardon me. Every woman has to do with love. You surely.’

“‘Yes. I once had thoughts on the subject—a long time ago. I have none now. If you want to talk of *love*, there’s Mrs. Grey yonder. I dare say she knows all about it. I am tired to death of the subject. Women talk of little else. I prefer chemistry.’ She rose, and took up a volume on that science.

“I felt inclined to tease her. ‘Can you tell me anything about elective affinities?’ I said.

“‘Yes!’ she said. ‘They often end in smoke.’

“‘What do you know of the attraction of repulsion?’

“‘That it is in you.’

“‘On your reputation as a chemist, tell me, do you think I am a simple volatile substance?’ She laughed, and threw down the book. We talked till the carriage came. They all went to the gate with me. Miss Hastings wrapped a shawl over my head, and told me she should come to the castle in the morning. We parted well pleased with each other.”

## CHAPTER V.

## THE BEGINNING OF SORROW.

"Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?"

*Ecclesiastes.*

"The company of fools may at first make us smile, but at last never fails of rendering us melancholy."

GOLDSMITH.

I LEARN from the Countess Caroline's letters, and also from my Aunt Margaret herself, that the day of her christening was long remembered as a sad one in the Earl of Carleton's family. On that day Arundel Raby for the first time showed symptoms of a disordered brain. When he was taken away from the company for his accustomed sleep after dinner, his maid placed him beside his brother on a bed. The little viscount was soon asleep; but Arundel lay for some time with wide-open eyes, staring stupidly at the ceiling. There seemed to her something unnatural in his look, and fancying that he would go to sleep more easily if she took him in her arms, she leaned forward for the purpose of raising him. To her surprise, the child did not seem to know her, but started up furiously, and hit her a blow in the face. He then fell back in a convulsive fit. The poor girl was very much frightened, and ran out of the room to call for help. In the lobby she met Miss Hastings, who, hearing what was the matter, returned with her to the child. As soon as she saw the little sufferer, she forbade the girl to alarm Lady Carleton or any one else in the house, and told her to bring a hot bath immediately. The terrified girl fetched the water, and poured it as she was ordered into a large footbath, and by the time she had done so, she found that Miss Hastings had contrived to get some of the clothes off the child. As soon as the bath was ready, she plunged him into the water and held him down. Poor Ann stood by, trembling for the result. She has often described the circumstances attending that first attack to me since. In about five minutes the convulsions began to decrease in violence, and the child breathed again naturally.

Miss Hastings then asked Ann if she were afraid to hold him down in the water while she went away for a few moments. Ann replied that she was not. Miss Hastings then wiped the water hastily from her hands and dress, and left the chamber. She ran fast to the door of the drawing-room, but resumed her usual composed step as she entered it. She glanced round the room, and having satisfied herself that Lady Carleton was so near the beginning of a game at chess that she would not be likely to steal up-stairs to look at her children for at least half an hour, she made a sign to Miss Price that she wished to speak with her. That lady was quick enough in apprehension, but rather slow in movement, and Miss Hastings waited with impatience for two minutes, outside the door, before Miss Price joined her.

"Little Arundel is ill. Come with me! Quick!" and Miss Hastings darted noiselessly up the stairs again. Miss Price used often to speak of the admiration she felt for the rapidity, energy, and perfect composure with which her friend (for she afterwards became her friend) did the right things in times of danger—or when circumstances required extraordinary promptitude and decision. On the present occasion, however, Miss Price lost no time either, and followed Miss Hastings into the bedroom. The pale weeping Ann, was sent to fetch a small medicine chest. The bath and friction restored the child's consciousness, and he smiled faintly in reply to some soft baby nonsense from Miss Hastings.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Miss Price, with tears in her eyes. "How shall we tell his mother?"

"We must be very careful how that is done," said Miss Hastings. "This is not an ordinary convulsive fit. If it be possible, keep this attack secret from her. I will call on you to-morrow, and explain my reasons for thinking this best. If it is as I fear, the child will quickly recover, and show no signs of having been ill. He will not remember it." When Ann returned, Miss Hastings sought out a particular medicine, and gave some to the child, who cried lustily;—which she seemed to approve. Some dry clothes belonging to one of the little

Hastingses were found and put on while the wet ones were dried, but as his little frock had not been touched by the water, that was put on at once, lest his mother should come in, and ask why his dress had been changed. When they had dried and arranged his hair, they laid him down on the bed beside his sleeping brother, and in five minutes he, too, was asleep. The bath was removed, the two ladies lingered about to see that all was as if nothing had happened, and then left the room.

As Miss Price took Miss Hastings' arm on her way to the drawing-room, she said in a low tone, "You think the child's brain is diseased?"

"I do; I thought so when I first saw him this morning."

"We all think him tolerably healthy, and certainly he is very intelligent for his age—much more so than his brother, though he is not so strong, physically."

"He is far too intelligent for his age. But we will talk of this to-morrow. I must see you alone, remember. Ann has promised not to mention what has just happened to her lady until we give her leave. Lord Merle—I mean the Earl of Carleton—ought to know of this, now he is in London. I will write to him."

"*You?*" asked Miss Price, who was a very *proper* old lady, and scarcely thought it fit that a lady should write to any gentleman not of her own family. "Are you well acquainted with the earl?"

"Oh, yes," said Miss Hastings; "that is, quite well enough to write a letter to him on a matter which I happen to know should not be spread abroad without his sanction. I shall not mention it to my brother or his wife."

Miss Price was much puzzled; and on her return to the drawing-room, tried to look as if she had nothing to trouble her. She had some conversation with Mrs. Grey; in the course of which that lady spoke, as most of the surrounding gentry did, when they went out visiting, of the castle and the Earl of Carleton's family.

"You know, ma'am, the present earl is quite a blessing to

the whole county. Nobody expected it of him!—Brought up in that neglected way as he was, we feared he might turn out as bad as his father. When he first came to live here, we all thought he would break out in some way. I was almost afraid to let my husband go to call on him. When he came home that day, I remember I said, 'Well, John, what do you think of him? Has he got anything of the Wicked Earl about him?' And John laughed, for he thought it was all curiosity, instead of real interest, and said, 'You may set your mind at ease; and so may all the rest of the ladies. The Earl of Carleton is as sane as I am. He is a sensible, clever, business-like young man; and will soon have his estates in capital order!—A beautiful creature—the countess!—You were her governess, I think, ma'am? Pray, may I ask if it was a long-standing engagement between her and the earl?'

"I never thought it part of my business as governess to ask," replied Miss Price, with her eyes fixed on her everlasting tatting.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, ma'am!—I do not ask from curiosity. I believe there never was a less curious person than myself. But I should be glad to be able to put a stop to the silly report that goes about that the earl was in love with Miss Hastings. (Don't look up, ma'am; she is looking this way.) It is said that when he found she was carrying on a correspondence with another gentleman—a physician I heard—he broke off his engagement, and married his cousin directly. Many a ball is caught in the rebound, you know. Now,—if I had it upon good authority that the earl was engaged to the countess for several years, that would effectually put a stop to the reports about him and Miss Hastings."

"It might do so, perhaps," said Miss Price; "but then it would deprive the neighbourhood of an excellent subject for their ingenuity and eloquence, which would be a pity. If that theme were taken out of their mouths, they would want a new one, and they might not get one half so fruitful in ill-nature and mischievous invention."

"You are quite severe, I declare," said Mrs. Grey.

"Don't you think one ought to be severe against evil-speaking, lying, and slandering?"

"Oh but nothing of that kind goes on among us, I assure you. We are not a scandal-loving community. And if you think there is no truth in the report about Miss Hastings and my Lord Carleton—Now"—and here the accomplished gossip lowered her voice still more—"now, as you were the countess's governess, I feel sure I may tell you my own private feeling on this subject: I should be very sorry to have Miss Hastings in her place. The countess is a favourite with everybody. Such a sweet creature! so young and pretty, and with such an air of fashion about her! Then she is so affable and condescending; and talks to every one so pleasantly. Miss Hastings, though she is only a merchant's daughter, carries herself very high: she will scarcely condescend to open her lips to one. She is a very superior woman, very learned and accomplished, and all that—but there is something about her I don't like. I'm sure she thinks a great deal of herself!—Now, don't you think so?"

"On the contrary—judging from the little I have seen, I should say she does not think so much of herself as others think of her."

The countess passed close by, at this moment, on her way towards the door. The affectionate old lady guessed whither she was bound, and trying to smile, said, "They are both asleep; but don't forget to tell nurse to have them ready at seven o'clock! The carriage will be here:—and I think I will go with them. They have had rather more excitement than usual to-day, and I should like to see them comfortably in bed."

"You shall do nothing of the kind, my dear Miss Price! They are perfectly well; they want no one but the nurses to take them home. I will trust them without either you or me for three hours. Never scold me about over-anxiety and fussiness again!" And she patted Miss Price's shoulder playfully, and left the room.

Mrs. Grey was enthusiastic. "What a charming creature! How fond you must be of her! I declare I never saw any

one with such pretty, fascinating ways. And her lovely children, too! Quite pictures! How proud and fond of them she must be! And the earl, too—what a happy man! It is quite enough to look at those noble twins to see that there is no fear of hereditary disease there. Indeed, as my husband says, there never was a man more in his right mind than the present earl. And perhaps his father was never really mad; it might have been nothing but a dreadful temper and a good deal of *eccentricity*. You know, all the Rabys, for the last hundred years, have been very odd, and *some* have been quite mad. My husband has studied the family history a good deal. He says the Rabys have all been naturally very clever, and having had stupid people to deal with, and uncontrolled power to deal with them, they have, as a matter of course, been often half mad with anger. Do you know, I think there is a touch of the old earl about little Master Arundel. Something in the eyes. Very fine eyes they are, to be sure; but a little wild;—don't you think so?"

"Think what?" asked Mr. Hastings, who seeing Miss Price evince unmistakable signs of impatience under the terrible infliction of Mrs. Grey's long tongue, came forward benevolently, to victimise himself and allow her to escape.

"Can there be any truth in the things that silly woman says?" was a question which haunted Miss Price all that evening and the next day, till she saw Miss Hastings come to the castle.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### A MORNING VISIT AND A WOMAN'S MISSION.

"Not for this  
Faint I, nor mourn, nor murmur—other gifts  
Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,  
Abundant recompense."

WORDSWORTH.

"THERE is a property of good in all things evil," said Miss Hastings to her sister-in-law at breakfast, the day after the

christening, *à propos* of that lady's complaint that "Lady Carleton still retained one of her evil London habits, and never left her dressing-room till twelve o'clock."

"Why, what good can you possibly see in that?" asked Mrs. Hastings.

"This good: that I wish to learn something more of Miss Price than I could do, except *en tête-à-tête*; and if I go up to the castle by eleven o'clock, I shall have an hour's talk with her before I see Lady Carleton."

Miss Hastings set off to walk to the castle alone. She laughed at Mrs. Hastings' fears that she would be alarmed at the red deer, or dislike the feeling of being alone.

As she proceeded across the park, she stopped often to gaze from the tops of the wood-crowned eminences. Many a view seemed quite familiar to her, though she had never been at Carleton before. They brought back to remembrance the days when they had been described to her so eloquently, that this, the reality, seemed but a shadow of that description. There came also to her mind a sweeter and bitterer recollection—a recollection of whispered hopes that she might one day stand, as she did then, on these hills, and say: "Yes; this is just what you told me!" And those words then came to her lips.

"Yes; this is just what he told me!"—The scene was indeed the same as her lover had depicted, but under what different circumstances from those fondly dreamed by both did she now gaze on it! Alas, for the vanished hopes of youth! He was not there, to say "All that you see is yours—is *ours*." He was not there to fling a glory over all she looked upon. He was now nothing to her but a recollection—a volume of sweet thoughts and fair imaginings, which had been taken from her, and which was now irrevocably gone.

"Gone!—Alone!—Always alone!" How often, in the dull sleeplessness of night did those words ring through the soul of Margaret Hastings! She had learned to stifle the dreary echo they made there. Now, as she stood leaning against an oak-tree, to note the varied beauty that spread around her,



these words seemed to creep through her veins ; "Gone!—Gone!—Alone!—Always alone!"

She looked at the noble castle—the emblem of power and social greatness—of memorable times and memorable men—the fountain from which high ensamples and gracious help flowed down to the world around. "I might have been a queen there!" she thought. "More than that—I might have devoted my life to him—my heart's dearest treasure! I might have made him and myself happy."

"Yes," whispered an evil spirit within ; "and why did you not? Because you sought to raise yourself above the generality of women. And in what have you been above them? You bowed down before a chimera you called *Right*; which was nothing but the fear of a remote possibility; and you gave love, and pity, and generosity, and true womanly nature to the winds."

"Down, demon, down! I will not hear you. It is false! false! I am weak now, but you shall not overcome me. Have I wrestled with you so often and gained the mastery, to be conquered now?" And the strong woman sought more strength where alone she had ever found it.

Beneath that old tree whose struggles with ten thousand storms had made him nobler and better fitted for his Maker's purpose, she prayed that God would help her to resist the wickedness of her own heart, and to do bravely and unselfishly the work allotted to her that day. The winds sang a *Benedicite* above her head, and she became calm and refreshed. Margaret Hastings, the world, who knew you not, said you were *hard*! It would be a blessing for the world if more women hardened themselves in this fashion!

On she went, with a steady step, over the sunny grass, soothing her perturbed soul with the music-wisdom of an old poet:\*

"Knowing the heart of man is set to be  
The centre of this world, about the which  
These revolutions of disturbances  
Still roll; where all the aspects of misery

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\* Daniel. Epistle to the Countess of Cumberland.

Predominate; whose strong effects are such  
As he must bear, being powerless to redress;  
And that unless above himself he can  
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!"

It was the middle of July, and the lime-trees were in blossom. All along that glorious avenue they shook out their perfume as she passed; and Miss Hastings, in whose nature nothing was defective; who, far from despising, cherished pure sensation, as she cherished the intellectual faculty within her,—felt her spirit rise and her step become more buoyant under the gladdening influence of the rich summer-time.

She arrived at the castle; and the question then was, how to get in. On that side there seemed no entrance; all the windows, too, were shut up—it was evidently uninhabited. There was a broad terrace here, and the view from it was magnificent. As she passed before a large bow-window of one of the deserted rooms, she thought within herself: "If I lived here, I would have *this* for my morning room." And that room became, in after-years, the one with which the reader is already familiar—her new-born niece's, *my* Aunt Margaret's parlour.

Finding that she could not gain admission on this side, she turned a corner of the building, and stood in the great front court, with its fountain designed by the celebrated Bernini.

As Miss Hastings cared for art as well as nature, she stopped to examine the fountain, and found that it was as fine a work as it was reported to be. Then she turned round to inspect the front of the castle. It was massive and grey; a large central building, flanked by two great turreted towers. In the middle a broad flight of steps led to the great hall-door. One valve was open, and she passed through it into the hall. No one was there. Miss Hastings was not in a hurry, and set herself to examine that beautiful hall while she waited for the appearance of a servant. It was then, as it was in my time, light and very lofty—paved with alternate squares of black and white marble. It had large gothic windows, looking into the front court, partially adorned with painted glass,

on which the escutcheon of the family was repeated many times. The double staircase, with its carved oak balustrades, sprang up, with wonderful lightness of effect, from the two sides near the further end of the hall, and after one or two smaller landing-places, reached its point of junction, a handsome gallery immediately facing the entrance. Upon this gallery one or two doors opened, leading into the upper corridors. It was from this gallery, the reader may remember, that I obtained my first view of the hall, on the morning after my arrival at Carleton. It was used as a music-gallery in the days of James and Charles I., when masques were often performed by the younger members of the family, with their aristocratic, and sometimes *royal* guests; for if the records of Peter Merrie, chaplain to Arundel, fourth Baron Carleton, speak truth, her Majesty Queen Anne (of Denmark) took part in divers masques and mummeries in the hall of the castle;—the sapient King James himself being among the admiring spectators. I have forgotten to say that griffins, with gilded balls clasped between their fore-claws, the crest of the Raby family, figured in every available part of the architecture. Two huge griffins, in granite, flanked the great, yawning chimney; and, two and two, they guarded the bottom of each flight of stairs. There was a billiard-table on one side, which looked quite diminutive in that large area; oak settles stood by the chimney, and several throne-like chairs, to each of which some history was attached, stood in the recesses of the windows. Miss Hastings' eyes looked approval on the great hall. It was just what she expected to find it.

Still no servant came. She stepped back into the courtyard, and looked up at the front of the building to see if there were any signs of life about the place. At an open window adorned with flower-pots, high up in one of the towers, she saw a green watering-pot in a yellowish little hand, and above it, the white cap and peaceful face of Miss Price. The visitor soon found means to attract her attention. "How am I to get up to you?" she asked. "Your bower seems inaccessible."

"I will send some one to you," was the reply; and the white cap disappeared. After waiting a few minutes longer, a very lordly footman came to the hall, and conducted Miss Hastings up the great staircase to the north tower, where Miss Price's apartments were situated.

"How is the child this morning?" inquired Miss Hastings, when the two had seated themselves on either side of the open window.

"Quite well. Indeed, better than he has been for the last fortnight. Every one had noticed a depression about him, I hear. To-day he seems quite recovered."

Poor Miss Price looked agitated. Bending forward gently, and laying her thin hand on her visitor's, she said, with tears in her eyes, in a low, fearful voice, "Do you think that the sweet boy will grow up insane?"

Miss Hastings took the trembling hand and pressed it silently.

"But tell me what ground you have for fearing this. His parents are both remarkable for intellectual vigour. At all events, the earl is. I never saw a man superior in mind to Lord Carleton." The hand was slightly pressed again. "I never heard of any insanity in the family."

"Probably not;—*because* you have lived in it. Lady Morton would not think it well to allow the insanity, which she knew to exist in her father's family, to become a theme of conversation in her own. You are aware that my brother and Lord Merle—I mean, the present Earl of Carleton—have been friends from childhood, and that there are no secrets of the Raby family hidden from ours. Insanity, in various forms and degrees, is hereditary in it, as in many other ancient houses. It is impossible to read the family history for the last hundred years, and not be convinced of this. Those who have studied the mysterious laws by which hereditary disease works, have observed that the scourge often passes over one generation, or touches it so slightly as to be scarcely perceptible, and then reappears in the next with increased force. To go no further back than the late earl—the *wicked earl*, as he is popularly called—he was partially insane during the

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greater part of his life, and he died raving mad. This is the account given to his son by the English physician and the foreign servants who were with him during his last illness.

"In all cases, even those freest from hereditary disease, the marriage of near kindred—especially so near as cousins-german—should be avoided. In every family there are peculiar weaknesses and tendencies to disease, which, if its members intermarry, are likely to appear in an aggravated form in their offspring. The Earl of Carleton married his first cousin—a beautiful, clever, and, to all appearance, a perfectly sane and healthy girl; yet I cannot forget that she is his insane father's sister's child, and that the laws of nature are no respecters of persons. Her first child died in Rome soon after its birth—it was impossible that it could live. These twins, now nearly two years of age, are remarkably fine children. They deserve all the praise I have heard of them. I do not wonder that their mother's life is one waking dream of maternal love! How would she look if you were to go to her and say, 'Your beautiful children may grow up unsightly idiots, miserable lunatics!'"

"My poor, poor child!" murmured the old governess. "But surely you exaggerate. There must be some mistake! Would her own mother have forced on this match (as, I know, she did)?—would her father have allowed it?"

"Yes; on account of the earldom and forty thousand a year. On this account would both fathers and mothers, like Sir Joseph and Lady Morton, steadfastly ignore, never take the pains to investigate, the truth! They do not bear in mind that awful threat—carried out through all nature: '*I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.*' And such parents do hate God, for they worship the World, and sacrifice their own children to Mammon—with such result at this!"

"You are severe, Miss Hastings."

"I am; if to speak the truth be to be severe."

"But why, if you condemn Sir Joseph and Lady Morton, are you silent on the subject of the earl's fault—I had well-

nigh said *crime*? He, too, must have known that, in all probability, he entailed a miserable life upon his offspring when he married, and that he doomed his wife to bitter pain and disappointment. Why do you not blame *him*?"

"I think his conduct blamable; although some excuse may be found for it, perhaps, if we were to give him a hearing. But it is useless for our purpose, now, to blame any one. We shall certainly not make the countess's pain less by criminalizing her husband. It is to save her all pain on this subject as long as we can, and, at the same time, to arrange a plan for proper medical treatment of the child, that I have sought a private interview with you."

"You may be mistaken. Children often have convulsive fits without growing up insane," said Miss Price, who was anxious to persuade herself that it was so.

"Not of the peculiar kind we saw yesterday. *That* was caused by disease of the brain."

"You speak as if you had studied the subject."

"I am interested in this 'worst ill that flesh is heir to.' For the last ten years I have pursued the study of nervous and cerebral disease as well as a woman can. I have read many books on insanity, in all its branches—from slight monomania, and what is commonly called weakness of brain, to frenzy and imbecility. I have had the advantage of intimate acquaintance with a physician who has devoted his life to the study of this branch of his profession. From his experience I have learned much; under his guidance, I have myself been of use in mitigating evil in very many cases. I have not shrunk from the sight of the most painful forms of insanity."

"What a dreadful occupation!" exclaimed good Miss Price.

"Yes; I believe most people consider me half mad for taking so much interest in mad people," replied Miss Hastings, with a sad smile.

"Is it solely from taste that you employ yourself thus?" asked Miss Price, whose curiosity and good sense were being roused, in an equal degree, by her visitor.

Miss Hastings smiled again. "Partly from taste (if you like

to call it so) and partly from principle. I believe every unmarried woman ought to have some regular employment, if it be only to keep her out of harm; for 'Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands and heads to do.' Married women have plenty of business ready prepared to their hand,—if they will only do it—better still,—if they followed the Apostle's injunction, and 'do it with all their might.' Unmarried women have the disadvantage of a wider choice; for it is a serious evil that they *can* raise a doubt as to whether this or that is their proper work. For my own part, I was led on by degrees to take an active part in the treatment of mental disease in my own neighbourhood. Many circumstances conspired to make me take an interest in mental derangement. It was a fearful terrific interest at first. In time, Dr. Ward induced me to read books on this subject, under his direction, and from them I learned how slowly and insidiously this evil grows, and how very widespread it is. He found me useful. Indeed, as it is so rare a thing to find a woman of my position with spare time and some knowledge of the disease, able and willing to work under him, he was glad to secure my services; and as he is an old friend of my father's, and a person of high character and refinement, no one at home raised any objection to my visiting lunatic asylums with the doctor, and reading as much as he pleased about mental disease. Children liable to become imbecile or insane I have helped to improve, and if I have not always made them wiser, I have certainly made them happier. If I am not mistaken, Arundel Raby's will be one of those rare cases of mental disease which are the most painful to the sufferer, the most difficult to treat, and by far the most touching to witness. For years he will give no indication of cerebral derangement;—he will show extraordinary mental capacity and high moral qualities;—he may be foremost in school and college. As he grows to manhood and maturity he will probably exhibit brilliant flashes of genius; he may even be remarkable for steadiness of mind—for acute logical power and mathematical talent—for an almost unerring judgment and the soundest sense in practical matters."

"If that be the case," interrupted Miss Price, "what makes you say he will grow up insane?"

"Because, if there is latent disease in the brain, he will hold these noble gifts by a very uncertain tenure. They may be totally obscured for months, and perhaps years of mental darkness, during which he will suffer much. His life will alternate between seasons of intellectual brightness and vigour and others of insanity and extreme mental depression, during which he will not, alas! be totally unconscious of the change in himself; but will suffer acutely from *the knowledge* that he is losing his reason."

"This is so new, so astounding, so dreadful," said Miss Price, "that you must excuse me if I hesitate to give credence to it immediately. I see that you have much reason to support your opinion; but some medical advice——"

Miss Hastings interrupted her. "You know Lady Carleton well. She appears amiable, and is decidedly clever and full of thought. Has she strength of mind to bear the whole of this painful truth? Remember what it is:—it involves her father and mother in an accusation of culpable neglect, in not stating to her the true nature of her marriage—even of something worse than *neglect*. Her husband it shows as a deceiver,—one who took advantage of her ignorance that he might gratify his selfish ambition, and have an heir to his old title and large estates. After glowing with indignation at what, if she have a spark of honourable feeling, she must consider as the most wretched trick; after seeing that there is, there can be, no redress for her; after having her pride crushed and her love for both parents and husband thus outraged,—a deep grief, perhaps the deepest, remains behind. Her children,—upon them will the curse descend. She will have to live in daily dread of this—perhaps to see them idiots, or raving mad. Say, is she strong enough to have all her earthly happiness taken from her at one stroke, and yet live to perform the arduous duties which will then remain to her?"

"No, no!" and Miss Price spoke imploringly. "Spare her this! She need not know all—or perhaps any of it, yet.



She is so young—so unacquainted with sorrow ! Tell Caroline that her husband has deceived her—that her children are likely to be insane ! why, I would not answer for her life a week.”

“I will write to Dr. Ward, and tell him to communicate with the earl immediately, and to accompany him *as a visitor* to the castle. While he is here, you and the earl must contrive that he have every opportunity of observing the two children, and of questioning their nurses. *His* opinion the earl will trust, I know ; and upon his advice, you and the children’s nurses, and their mother too, must act implicitly.”

“Poor little lambs ! You do not think there is anything the matter with the viscount ?” asked poor Miss Price.

“No. He seems to me to be a healthy child ; the brain is not too active in his case ; and from many things about him, I judge that he is less likely than his brother to be attacked by disease, mental or physical.”

“You look exhausted ; you are tired with your walk. No ; you suffer for your kind interest in others.” And the tearful old lady wiped her eyes again, and then kissed Miss Hastings’ broad forehead and smoothed her hair ;—she had taken off her bonnet.

“Yes,” replied Miss Hastings, somewhat mournfully. “We must weep with them that weep. And you, too,—are you less angry than you were awhile since ? Do you forgive me for coming with strange and apparently unfeeling words to throw down your castle of hope and joy—in which you expected to pass the remaining years of your life ? Do not think I have not looked well at the pain I should inflict. But tell me, is it not better that I should have told you ? The countess wants a friend, *now*, more than ever. Sooner or later she must know all—if she live ; and will it not be a blessing to you to know that you have done all in your power to mitigate her child’s sufferings ? I saw yesterday that yours was no time-serving, self-interested, attachment ; I was convinced that you loved her. I guessed from your position here that you had no nearer and dearer ties ; and, therefore, that

you would think it your duty, as well as your pleasure, to devote yourself to this unhappy family.

She was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, to say that her ladyship would be glad to see Miss Hastings.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### A PEEP AT THE COUNTESS IN PRIVATE.

"Not a glance may wander there  
But it lights on something fair."

MISS JEWSEURY.

"I will chide no breather in the world but myself, against whom I know most faults."

*As You Like It.*

LADY CARLETON'S private apartments were those in the south corridor, occupied in my childhood by her son, Mr. Arundel Raby; and her *boudoir*, or private sitting-room, was the one I have already spoken of, where I was allowed to breakfast for the first time with him and my Aunt Margaret. Some forty years before that event of my childhood, my great-aunt paid her first and last visit to the Countess Caroline in that same apartment.

The same, but yet how different! At that time it had been recently fitted up for the reception of a young and happy wife. Rose-coloured window-hangings, while they shut out the too great brightness of the sun's rays, cast a beautiful glow over the room. Gems of the Italian painters hung on the walls; tables and shelves laden with the wonderful porcelain of the East and of the West lurked in every available corner; for my Lady Carleton had the fashionable taste of her day, and had lavished large sums upon china vases and monsters, Raffael ware, Palissy ware, old Sèvres and Dresden and Worcester. During her life she retained this taste: it did not pass from her even when misfortune pressed heavily. The taste for old china may be considered a frivolous one by many persons, but I have never been able

to look upon it with contempt since I have heard how much pleasure it gave to the Countess Caroline. Her mother, it seems, was one of the leaders of the fashion in this matter, and used to take her daughters about with her to the India shops. Lady Morton had a valuable collection of genuine Chinese vases; not so large, perhaps, as those famous ones belonging to the Porcelain King, but large enough to excite the envy of half her pottery-loving acquaintance—the witty *dilettante*, Horace Walpole, at their head. The Mortons were frequent visitors at Strawberry Hill; and Caroline was its owner's favourite, because she had his own love of pretty things, besides being a pretty thing herself. Horace Walpole made her a connoisseur in porcelain and pottery; and when on her marriage with her wealthy cousin she began to form a collection, he assisted her with his judgment in making purchases, and gave her two famous Palissy dishes as a wedding present. The countess spent a great deal of money on her collection, which though not very large, is valuable, as I am informed by those who understand these matters. This collection of porcelain is shown among the curiosities of Carleton Castle. Besides devoting a great deal of money, the Countess Caroline is said to have devoted a great deal of time to collecting and arranging these articles of *vertù*. Before the birth of her children, she spent an hour or two every morning in dusting, arranging, studying, and cataloguing her treasures. She would not allow a servant to touch them, for a reason I found recorded in one of her letters to her sister.

"Do you remember," she writes, "when poor Jackson let fall mamma's love of a majolica vase, and broke it into five hundred pieces? What a rage she was in! She turned away the poor creature,—after calling her a great many unpleasant names, and could never be persuaded to take her back. I know I thought at the time that she richly deserved the punishment. As poor old Lord Orford said on the occasion, 'it would argue great want of proper feeling and taste to forgive such an awkward wretch. Her act belonged to the class of things *qui ne se pardonnent pas*.' Perhaps he was satirical;

but, at the time, I really believed mamma was right; and took his lordship *au pied de la lettre*. I think so differently now. I have become quite a thoughtful moralist since Frederick and I were married. You know he always was an insufferably correct and moral boy. He is just the same as ever; only a trifle worse, *i.e.*, better; and is actually making me as good as himself! In consequence of living continually with this person, I am beginning to take heed to my ways. I see it is not proper to fly into a passion, even about anything so momentous as an eggshell teacup. I had one of those little darlings broken the other day by my maid, and I felt a very strong inclination to break her head in return.—That does not sound pretty; but it is the truth!—Frederick happened to hear me storming, and was much shocked, I am sure. The more so as I remained in a vile temper the rest of the day. He was very kind, I will say *that* for him. He said nothing about having overheard my angry speeches; he seemed not to notice my sullenness, and treated me as if I had been as amiable as usual. In the evening when I sat down to work and he took a book to read to me, he selected the ‘Rape of the Lock.’ How witty it is! My temper soon recovered. You know how charmingly Frederick reads. I was quite delighted, and forgot all the grief of the forenoon. At last he came to the line

‘And mistress of herself though china fall.’

I wish you could have seen the serio-comic glance the man let fall on me over the top of the book. I could not help laughing; nor could I help starting up, and giving him a pat on the cheek for his impertinence. I gained nothing by that move, you may be sure, but a variety in the impertinence. Afterwards we had a little talk about getting into a passion. Frederick has a perfect horror of anything of the kind, and alluded to the days of his childhood, when he saw so many awful exhibitions of a passionate temper. You know mamma once told us that his father was a very violent man, and got into the most dreadful furies about nothing. Somehow, I

have always hated the very name of my uncle. He was a brute, I am sure. Now, you see it would be very hard for poor Frederick if his wife were to get into dreadful furies about what he would call nothing, and thus repeat the unhappiness of his childhood. I thought over this the next morning, and determined not to get into a passion again. But as I knew well enough that I could not, like Pope's perfect woman, be

'Mistress of myself though china fall,'

I made a wise resolution not to allow any one to handle my collection but myself in future. Frederick says I shall soon be a saint if I set to work to cure my faults in this style. But really one ought not to get into rages. It is very wicked, I do believe. Poor Price used to tell me so—often enough, I remember. I suppose my temper is naturally very violent, for papa says that I am 'every inch a Raby,' and am not at all like the Mortons."

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Only a few of the most beautiful specimens of the various kinds of porcelain in her collection were selected to adorn the countess's sitting-room. The others had a room to themselves which she kept carefully locked, lest an intrusive cat, or child, or servant should commit havoc there. Besides Italian pictures and old china, the pretty rose-coloured room boasted furniture of a costly kind, and generally a profusion of fresh-out hot-house flowers, in vases, which saturated the air with their luscious perfume.

Miss Hastings had time to give one comprehensive glance around before the countess raised her eyes from the letter she was writing. She looked very lovely, in a flowing white wrapper of Indian muslin, and a simple-looking, but very costly, little cap of Mechlin lace, tied in a semi-puritan, semi-coquettish fashion under the sweet little chin. Lady Carleton was no exception to the general rule that a taste for good china and a taste for good lace go together. She sat sideways, near an open window, on a couch, with a knee-hole desk of

the finest marqueterie before her. She held a pen in one hand, and was writing very rapidly ; the elbow of the other arm rested on the desk, and the hand supported the side of her head as she wrote.

"How pretty! How unconscious! How full of life, and what perfect grace!" thought Miss Hastings. "He *must* love her!"

Thus far I have derived my account of Miss Hastings' visit to the castle, which might have been her own, from other sources. I shall now have recourse again to Lady Carleton's letters. In one of these she speaks, in detail, of this visit.

"This morning Miss Hastings came to see me ; or rather, to see Miss Price and me, for she spent an hour with Miss Price before I was informed of her arrival. You need not fear that my head will be turned by what you call that 'undue reverence for rank which is so prevalent among provincials.' Every person whose respect and good opinion I care a groat about, is sure to give my old governess precedence of me. This serves to keep my pride down. It is only the ignorant and the *parvenus* round about who fall down and worship '*my* ladyship.' When I am with them I make a point of treating Miss Price with the most dutiful respect. The other day I made Mrs. Grey, a county member's wife, stare, by declining an invitation to a *fête*, 'because I did not like to leave Miss Price alone ; and I felt sure that she could not be persuaded to accompany me to any but a very select party.' This was because the woman had sailed past the dear old lady without noticing her. I wish you could have seen her puzzled face. I do love to mystify a self-satisfied person! It is the only worldly pleasure I have left. It is a great mistake to suppose that all people born and bred in the country are simple-minded, innocent, and unworldly. I find my country neighbours as arrant worldlings, in grain, as my town ones—and without their polish ; and they only brighten up into intelligence and warm into feeling when they have something ill-natured to say of anybody,—especially if that

body be a stranger in these parts, and at all superior to themselves. Miss Hastings, for instance, is just the sort of woman to stir up all the female bile in the neighbourhood. I'd wager my life there is not a thing she does, not a word she says, that the Carleton and P—— society do not lay hold of and twist into the strangest signification. Her dress, her manner of entering a room, the way she fixes her eyes upon any one who speaks to her—'even upon gentlemen'—I have already heard spoken of as something 'very strange'—'altogether,' etc.

"I was so absorbed in writing to Frederick when she was shown in, that I did not hear or see the door open. When I happened to raise my eyes I found her standing in the middle of the floor looking at me. How long she had been there I cannot tell. As soon as she was seated I saw that she looked ill; as if something had occurred to agitate her. I thought it was the long walk, and made her lie down on a couch. There is certainly something very attractive in her face. Do you remember some lines of Lord Herbert of Cherbury (I think), addressed '*To a Pale Beauty*'? I could not help thinking of them as I looked at my visitor. But she is not *beautiful* remember! We did not fall as naturally and easily into conversation as we had done the day before. There seemed to be some cloud over Miss Hastings' mind. There was something of the kind over mine. I do not think I am jealous. But, as I looked at her, I could not help feeling that if a man loved such a woman at all, it would be *passionnément, éperdument, et pour toujours!* She allowed me to scrutinise her without showing the least uneasiness. I sat on a low seat, and she lay with her head resting on the arm of the sofa, with her face inclined towards me and facing the light. Now, Frederick is in the habit of resting himself on that same sofa and in that same attitude. I felt strongly tempted to say so.

"What self-command she has! She looked at me with perfect composure, and replied:

"'Indeed! and when he lies here, do you put yourself at his feet, in that way,—like a good child?' And she smiled

a smile like a Frenchwoman, *fin* and full of pretty *malice*—but with nothing *malicious* about it.

“I could not feel angry; and trying to laugh it off, said: ‘Not always. Sometimes we change places; he sits here and I lie there.’

“‘Satisfactory, as far as it proves a reciprocity of taste in lounging and low seats, and a sort of conjugal equality which it is delightful to hear of. But, my dear Lady Carleton, you must pardon me; if your husband ever sits upon that little stool he must look supremely ridiculous—his legs are so long!’

“In spite of myself I could not help laughing.

“She went on, ‘I see that you, like my sister-in-law, have unconsciously slidden into the country fashion of talking to strangers about what is most interesting to you,—your own domestic circles, your husbands, their peculiarities and their perfections infinite. Sophia talks to me of Henry, Henry, Henry, as if I did not know him as well as she does! Now, I expected better things from you. You *can* talk of something besides your husband and your children.’

“‘Thank you for the implied compliment,’ I replied. ‘But if I speak the truth honestly, there are no topics of conversation I find so agreeable, when with a friend. You must, therefore, forgive my mistake. I really forgot that we never met till yesterday.’

“She smiled, and said, ‘I believe I deserved that. But the fact is, ever since I came to my brother’s house I have been bored to death with domesticities. Do have the charity to give me a little general information; a little pleasant talk, not personal. What a lovely picture! A Guido, is it not?’ and her eye rested on my beautiful Madonna.

“‘Yes; we brought it from Florence.’

“‘Florence! Ah, you were there. I have been in Florence, too. Henry and I were in Italy together, long ago.’

“‘Did you go merely for the pleasure of travelling?’ I asked.

“‘Oh, no; I had had an illness. The doctors talked a



great deal of nonsense, and sent me to Italy as the only means of saving my life. I should have recovered just as well in England, I have no doubt. However, I am grateful to the profession for my three years in glorious Italy. Do you remember the road from Lucca to Florence?’

“And then we had a very interesting conversation concerning our respective experiences in Italy. I told her of our purchases—Frederick’s of old pictures, and mine of porcelain. I took her to see my collection, with which she seemed pleased. Her mother is fond of porcelain, and on that account Miss Hastings has studied the subject. She knows more about the history of the art than I do, I suspect. She told me a good deal about Palissy. He is a great favourite of hers. It was reading an old French book about Palissy that first made her take a real interest in pottery, she says. She ‘felt sure that there must be something in an art to which a man like Palissy would sacrifice everything but principle and honour.’

“‘But,’ I argued, ‘Palissy sacrificed the comfort of his wife and children. He was selfish.’

“‘No,’ she replied, quickly, and I saw the colour come into her pale face; ‘do not say that. You are capable of knowing and feeling better. Genius is never *selfish*; that is, in the *bad* sense of that word. The egotism of genius is spiritual, not sensual; divine, not worldly. Poor Palissy! Though his department of art was not very high, he had real genius. Do you think *he* did not feel for the wife and children who wanted food, while he broke up the furniture to feed his furnace? I will not exculpate him by saying it was for *them* he toiled and suffered privation—that for them he pursued his experiments into the very Cave of Despair—lighted only by the hope of scientific truth. It was not for *them*, primarily not for any human interest that he toiled, and thought, and starved his frail bodily tenement,—it was for the sake of *truth*, of the *discovery* he had to make. He felt *that* as an imperial duty calling him onward, and he dared not disobey its voice.’

“‘If I had been his wife I should have hated him. The

cold-hearted man, who lived only for a scientific discovery, and let his wife and children starve!’ said I, with some warmth. ‘If he was so entirely devoted to his dishes and furnaces, what business had he with wife or child? It seems to me, that there are many men who should not marry.’

“She glanced at me gravely, and then said, ‘Perhaps you are right; men with a genius for the investigations of science—for instance, *might*——’

“‘Oh,’ said I, ‘no man of genius should marry. What business have poets, painters, musicians with wives?’

“‘To love and be loved by,’ she replied. ‘They, less than ordinary men, can dispense with sweet human love. They must always love.’

“‘I have no objection to that,’ I replied. ‘Let them be in love as much as they like; but their love should always be unfortunate, and generally unrequited. It develops their genius, you know. As they live but for the development of their genius, why should they marry and render a woman wretched by showing how little they care for her, how insignificant she is to them, when she ceases to inspire poems and pictures, and music? I think men of genius should never marry.’ She was silent. ‘Why do you not combat my opinion?’ I asked. ‘I am sure you do not agree with me.’

“‘I do not agree with what you have just now said; and if I thought it was your real opinion, I might attempt to combat it. Men of genius should not marry, you say. But how are you to prevent women—generally the best women—from falling in love with men of genius? Women are apt to love, to worship, to adore those divinely gifted sons of earth. The purer their own hearts, the more entirely will they give themselves up to the worship of genius. Their love is spontaneous, disinterested; they ask no joy beyond that of devoting their lives to the service of the great man in whose eyes they have found favour. Men of genius have generally the most devoted wives. None of these, I apprehend, would exchange her life of humble, loving ministration, to be ministered unto and tended like a queen by an ordinary man.’

“‘They must be poor silly creatures!’ I exclaimed.

“‘Nay—they are generally high-minded women.’

“‘What! and make themselves slaves of men, in the way you describe?’

“‘There is no such thing as *voluntary* slavery, remember. There is nothing slavish in the devotion of love. To bring the argument home, and end it,’ she added, with a smile—‘do you think there is anything contemptible,—anything poor, silly, or weak-minded,—in the love *you* feel for your husband?’

“‘The love I feel for my husband!—Humph! That is not bringing the argument home to *me*, my dear Miss Hastings. To tell you a secret, there is nothing of *devotion* in it—I leave that to him. I have no objection to his devoting himself to me; which, to say the truth, he does rather more than I find quite convenient. As for me, why, like the witty Beatrice in the play, “I protest I love him no more than reason.” I love him in a reasonable way, as a reasonable man should be loved; not, as you say, women love a man of genius. Thank heaven, he is not a genius!’

“‘Is it possible!’ she exclaimed, looking at me in amazement.

“‘Is what possible?’ I asked. ‘That Lord Carleton is not a man of genius?’

“‘That *you* do not know that he is!’ she replied, somewhat disdainfully, I fancied. ‘You are his cousin, to be sure!’ she added in the same tone. ‘We know the fate of prophets in their own country!’ and she smiled as if she pitied me. Oh, Bessy! I felt the Raby blood within me then; and it prompted my reply.

“‘Really, Miss Hastings, as a wife, I feel extremely grateful for the high opinion, the evident admiration, the—what shall I call the feeling—you are so good as to entertain for Lord Carleton? Of course, my affection for him is strong enough to make me pass over the very contemptuous opinion you entertain of my own family. I know not what opportunities of judging you may have had. I am only his wife; but to me it is quite clear that he has no genius. He is a

sensible, clever sort of person, admirably fitted for his station, but he has no genius; or if he has, he has kept it carefully concealed from me. I would almost as soon be married to a madman as to a genius!

"Now, I was aware that what I said was calculated to irritate my visitor, and I was rather pleased to see a slight flush come over her pale cheek during the first part of my ill-natured address. I wanted to destroy that calm self-possession which offended my own pride. I thought I had succeeded, for her eyes flashed once; but I cannot tell what came over her. I had no sooner uttered the last words, than she bent her head (we were standing together in my china-room) and kissed my forehead with a long lingering kiss, such as I should have thought her proud lips never gave. In another moment I saw her going out at the door of the room, and glancing back towards me with those wonderful eyes of hers streaming with tears. It was several seconds before I recovered my surprise. Her kiss still warmed my forehead. It stirred my better nature. I darted after her. She was hesitating which way to turn at a corner where two galleries met.

"'Miss Hastings, Miss Hastings! Stop one moment. I—I fear I said something unkind; something that pained you, just now.' There I stood, half afraid, and yet fingering a fold of her shawl, and not daring to look at her eyes lest the tears should be there still. She is a generous woman, Bessy! There was no proud politeness. She put her arms round me and said,—

"'It is nothing. God bless you!'

"She was going away; I retained her. 'Stay a little longer; I shall think you are still offended if you go.'

"'I cannot stay!' she said. 'Good-by! If at any future time you want a friend, will you trust in Margaret Hastings? Will you? Can you?' and her eyes were fixed earnestly on mine.

"'I can—I will,' said I firmly. 'But why do you go?'

"'I cannot stay now.' And she moved away.

"At least, I shall see you to-morrow? I am going to the Rectory," said I, pursuing her, and taking her hand.

"No, no! Better not. Don't come to-morrow. I shall be gone the next day. We part *friends*'—and she pressed my hands—"but friends only in adversity! You wanted to know more of my experience in friendship. I will tell you thus much: there are some persons who could never be true friends except in the day of trouble. It is thus with you and me. You will not *forget* me, I know. And when sorrow overpowers you, perhaps you will come to me for comfort." So saying, she passed on, leaving me sad and perplexed.

"Frederick a man of genius!" She must be blind!

"Bessy, I cannot divest myself of the idea that there was—that there still may be—love on both sides. Love kept in restraint—hidden, stifled, perhaps believed to be dead within them, but still there. Alas, alas! I fancied I was such a happy wife! Don't tell me that I am happier than a thousand other wives of my acquaintance! *Qu'est-ce que cela me fait?* My card house is tottering."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE YOUNG MOTHER AND A REMINISCENCE OF VERSAILLES.

"The canon of the law is laid on him."

*King John.*

A FORTNIGHT after the date of the last letter the countess writes as follows:

"DEAR BESSY,

"Frederick is at home again. I do not think his visit to London has done him any good. He looks wretchedly ill. He avoids me; not unkindly—not as if I bored him; but as if he did not wish to let me see that he is troubled. Still, if Frederick could see into my heart, I think he need have no reserves from me. I wish I had never seen or heard of Miss Hastings! She is frequently in my thoughts now.

"I must not forget to mention a visitor who is here now:—

Dr. Ward, an old friend of Frederick's, whom he brought back from London with him. As you have had so much experience among medical men, you may perhaps know him. If you do I congratulate you on knowing a very delightful person. He sits with me a great deal in the morning; and as I see he is really fond of children, I do not send mine away. He seems never to tire of them, plays with them, and watches them as if they were his own. Then we have long talks together about the rearing and education of children. I have learned a great deal from him on this subject. As a physician, his advice is very valuable. He has warned me that Arundel will require much care. He says that his mind is already too active for a healthy child; that his nervous system is too much developed. He says that I must not be tempted to make him an intellectual prodigy. I am glad I was warned of this; for as he is such a clever little thing, it is very likely that I might have stimulated his brain too much. There is no danger of that now, after what Dr. Ward has told me concerning the short and painful lives of precocious children. Arundel is now subjected to frequent cold-water bathing, lives almost wholly in the open air, and is encouraged to run about and to do whatever he can with his arms and legs, and as little as possible with his brain. I think his visit to Carleton the luckiest thing in the world for me. I was just beginning to feel my own ignorance and inexperience in the management of children. Dr. Ward and Miss Price are quite intimate friends, and are full of each other's praises to me. He says that she is one of the best old ladies to have with children, because she has no old-lady-like notions about their training.

"I am sorry to say we are to lose Dr. Ward to-morrow. He has been here ten days. He lives at Brompton, near old Mr. Hastings, and knows that family very well. Margaret is his favourite I can see, though he does not say very much about her. I do not wonder that he is fond of her. He says she was the sweetest child he ever saw. Now, the dear old man could never resist a sweet child. Arundel is his darling. He is fond of Frank, too; but I have seen him walk

up and down the court-yard for an hour together with little Arundel by his side. I have given orders to Ann to attend implicitly to everything Dr. Ward tells her about the children; and she seems to have conceived an immense reverence for him. I am fortunate in having Ann for a nurse; she is so calm-tempered and sensible; but Dr. Ward advises my having another maid under her, one who is younger, livelier, and can sing sweetly. He seems to think that children should not be much with grave, dull, quiet people. I believe I shall belong to that respectable class before long. I have already begun to *think*; which is the first step towards dulness, you know."

\* \* \* \* \*

Some months afterwards I find the following passage in one of Lady Carleton's letters:

"You ask how the children are. We have been very uneasy about Arundel lately. He has had a sort of convulsive fit. I happened to go into the nursery just as he was recovering; or I believe they would have told me nothing about it. Frederick was there assisting at the child's recovery.

"In the middle of the night, as I lay awake, Frederick's face seemed to pass before me in the darkness, wearing the agonised expression I had observed that day in the nursery. In the morning, when I rose, it recurred again to my mind. When he was reading the paper at breakfast-time I scanned his countenance, and was shocked to see how very different it is from what it used to be. When we live constantly with people we do not see the changes in them, I know; but still it is strange that Frederick should have altered so very much within—let me see—six or seven months. It cannot be longer ago than that since I was looking at him with a half-critical eye one day, and thinking that he was remarkably handsome. Now, as the light shone full on his head, I saw that his hair is actually beginning to turn grey here and there; that his cheeks are pale, and his eyes hollow and worn. He really looks very ill. I cannot think how it is that I never observed it before. I questioned him at the time, but could not get him to say there was anything the matter."

\* \* \* \* \*

For more than two years I find nothing necessary to quote from the countess's letters; they are less frequent than formerly, and contain little but details of her domestic life and notifications of the growing beauty and intelligence of her two boys. The "little brown-eyed godchild," Margaret Hastings, is also spoken of as the "sweetest, *funniest*, most lively child"—and the "favourite plaything" of Frank and Arundel. At the end of that period Arundel has "another of those fits." He is ill for several weeks, after which his mother writes as follows:—"Arundel is playing about as usual again. He looks very pretty at this moment. He has climbed on to the music-stool, and is amusing himself with my new pianoforte. He is not drumming away with both fists, and delighting in the crashing discords, like any other child. He strikes a single note distinctly with one hand, and then seeks with the other for a note that harmonises with it. When he has found it, he smiles to himself in the prettiest way you can conceive. This morning he made a little melody, and was very happy; but afterwards he began to cry, because, as he said, 'it would not come again!'

"He would listen to the sonatas of Mozart and Haydn for a much longer time than I could go on playing them. When he sees me go to the instrument, he immediately throws down the plaything he happens to have in his hands at the time, and begins pushing a chair along the floor. When this chair is in contact with a certain part of the pianoforte, he scrambles on to the seat with great activity, and lays his head against the instrument. I wish you could see him at these times, Bessy! It would be the drollest thing in the world if it were not the most beautiful! His baby face assumes the *pleased* but grave look of a connoisseur, who knows not what he is going to hear, but who expects to be delighted. By the time I have selected the music and am seated, he has settled himself as I have described. We glance at each other; I dare not do more, because Dr. Ward says we must do nothing to stimulate his love of music. The doctor does not object to my playing in his hearing, or to his amusing himself at the



instrument; only we are to *teach* him nothing, and not to praise or encourage his infant efforts too much. During the soft, slow movements, especially where the melody is clear and rich, the child's face becomes really 'as the face of an angel.' Don't think I quote Scripture profanely, Bessy. No other words will express the truth. Does not some poet speak of the music breathing from a face? If no poet *has* spoken of such a thing, I can only say that some poet ought to speak of it directly. If you know any of the tuneful tribe who would be thankful for an idea, you may make him a present of this, with my best wishes. By the way, I dare say you are right about the dreadful dearth of 'ideas' in my letters now. Poor Bessy! It is hard for you to lie on that everlasting sofa—an everlasting invalid—with an everlasting craving for amusement, chiefly derivable from family letters; and then to find your former indefatigable correspondent growing remiss and stupid. I will try and amend, indeed I will. But if you only knew how pleasant it is to have *no* ideas!—Don't be shocked. Ah, Bessy, I scarcely ever have *ideas* now that I would not willingly get rid of, so that they pass into no other mind. '*A bas les idées!*' say I. Depend upon it, Bessy, it is *les idées* that brought about this terrible French revolution, which seems to come like the crack of doom upon you and all the rest of the world; and the reports of which, like the sounds of distant thunder, come rolling round my quiet home.

"That beautiful queen! How well I remember her face and manner! There never was anything in all this world so charming. I saw her four times in public, and three times in private. Once *we* (*she* and I, that is, *alone*) talked for three-quarters of an hour; and, setting aside the graciousness of the queen, the difference of rank, etc., I never in all my life talked to a woman I admired so much and loved so soon; for I *did* love her. It was impossible to help loving her, even in that short space of time. She was all loveliness. But you will say you have heard me extemporise and extravagise on this theme fifty thousand times; that it is one of my madneses.—But I will tell you a little thing which, woman as I

am, and vain as all men have discovered *women* to be, I never told to any one before. It is a trifle; but it helped to bind up the love of Queen Marie Antoinette inseparably with my own vanity—‘*et j’y tiens*,’ as the poor French people say, or used to say before this revolution, which seems to have changed everything.

“One evening, when we were in Paris, just after our marriage, Frederick and I were at a ball in the Tuileries. As an Englishwoman and a bride I attracted some attention there. It is pleasant to be admired in good French society; pleasanter than it is elsewhere;—at least, I found it so. The buzz of admiration was very charming to me then, I remember. There were some people with me whom I liked; and I talked gaily, and was happy. Presently I heard some one say: ‘*Comme elle ressemble à la reine, ma jolie compatriote! C’est absolument Marie Antoinette en miniature!*’ This was said of me, I knew; and I knew the voice also. It was an Englishman’s. I blushed with gratified pride; for it was Mr. Fox who had spoken! Then came a voice in reply, deep, sonorous, grand—even when uttering such a trifle: ‘*Mais, oui; elle ressemble beaucoup à la reine!—Cependant elle est plus Marie Antoinette que sa majesté elle-même. C’est la reine, moins la royauté!*’—The voice attracted my attention, and when I caught sight of this speaker, I was divided between aversion and admiration. I had never seen him before. He was not known to many persons about the court; M. de Calonne had brought him there that evening, I heard. I saw some few people who whispered and shook their heads when they spoke of him; he, towering above them, and smiling a keen sort of satire, looked about fearlessly, with the finest eyes set in the ugliest face you can conceive. Presently I saw Frederick talking to him; they seemed to know each other well; they had met in London. When I asked him the name of his extraordinary-looking friend, he said it was *M. de Mirabeau!* People about the French court knew him better afterwards!”

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## CHAPTER IX.

FRANÇOIS DE MERVILLE.

"And of his cheer he seemed full solemn sad."

SPENSER.

SOME weeks after the last letter, the countess wrote as follows:

"We shall be going to London soon; for many of our former Paris friends are there, driven out of their own country by this awful political convulsion, and we should like to be of service to them, if we can. I have been thinking lately that such a change *might* take place in England. I have dreamed once or twice that this place was being attacked by the mob, that Frederick and I escaped in disguise, and that we carried the two boys in our arms as far as a large building near P—— (the Lunatic Asylum), and where we were only able to save ourselves by feigning madness. There is no end to the horrors which the details of this revolution excite in the mind. Frederick is unable to think or talk of anything else just now. I believe this excitement does him good. He looks better, in spite of his violent indignation against the Jacobins."

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For some time after this, the countess's letters are dated from London, and are interspersed with allusions to, and observations on, the Great Event of her day. Her husband seems to have made himself a sort of emigrant's friend—giving time, money, and thought to the relief of the unfortunate French exiles who were crowding into London at that period. He does not seem to have confined his sympathies to those of his own rank, for the countess speaks to her sister of the numbers of "*ouvriers*," "*hommes de lettres*," "*artistes*," "*simples paysans*," etc., who flock to their house in St. James' Square to see the earl. He gives his time from ten until two, every day, to this business. She intimates, also, that he enlists her in his service among the women. Then

come long letters full of the distresses of the French women in London. The warmhearted countess can "scarcely eat her dinner for thinking of the many poor *émigrés* who have no dinner to eat." The anecdotes she tells of the suffering and generous self-devotion of the French families in which she interests herself, are very touching. I have learned, principally from François, that nothing could exceed the feeling of enthusiastic gratitude with which the Earl and Countess of Carleton were regarded by the French, of all ranks, in London at that time. I find the first mention of François himself in one of the Countess's letters during the following year.

"I have never yet mentioned the De Mervilles. That is a sad story. They come from Picardy, and are a younger branch of a good family. I do not know how Frederick became acquainted with them first; but I suspect his father, the *wicked lord*, practised some of his wickedness upon them; seduced the daughter by a promise of marriage, or something of that kind, which I think it better for all parties not to inquire minutely about. Then, when Frederick knew of this, after his father's death, he was anxious to make any reparation in his power (I do not *know*, remember; but I am almost sure it *was* so). He went to Amiens, where the De Mervilles lived (this was long before our marriage), and seems to have won their profound esteem and gratitude. I never heard him speak of them till about a month ago, when he told me that they had arrived in London, and that they were persons in whose fate he took a special interest. Their story is very sad. There is an old father, almost helpless from imbecility; a daughter, about thirty, who is insane; and a son, François, a young man of twenty. François' conduct is exemplary. He wished to become a priest, and studied at St. Omer's for some years. About two years ago his mother died, and his father and sister were left without any one to take charge of them. Frederick offered to pay amply for proper attendance on the two invalids. When he told me this, he added that 'it was no more than his duty to do *that*, since poor Madeleine's illness was the consequence of the late earl's unprincipled conduct.

However, it seems that the pride, or the delicacy, or the filial piety of François forbade his acceptance of my lord's offer. He determined to give up his profession and his hopes of advancement in life, and devote himself to his father and sister as long as they lived. He was known to hold loyal opinions; and during an outbreak of the revolutionary party at Amiens their small house was burned. Poor François had great difficulty in getting his father and sister out of the flames. Afterwards, he had no means of supporting them, for their little all was destroyed, with the exception of a small pension which Frederick had, some years before, settled on Madeleine. François wrote to ask his advice. Frederick, with his usual benevolence, wrote to François de Merville immediately, advising him to bring the poor old man and Madeleine to London, and offering him a good salary as his own secretary and general agent among the French emigrants here.—Not before he wanted such assistance, let me tell you, Bessy;—he has business enough among them to employ two or three secretaries. When François entered upon his work here, I was disposed to view him with favourable eyes, for he took a weight of French correspondence off my hands; but I soon began to like the young man for his own sake. He is very unlike any *young* French animal I ever saw: is calm, grave, and incapable of gaiety. The only relaxation he gives himself, in this house, is playing with Frank and Arundel;—he is fond of children, and the boys are becoming much attached to him. At home, poor fellow, he can have but little pleasure. I have been with Frederick to their lodging at Chelsea. It was a melancholy thing to see the childish old man—once a sculptor of great merit, Frederick says—and the imbecile daughter; the latter, as inert and helpless as the former, and with a far more painful expression in her handsome face. She heeds no one but François, whose never-failing kindness and tenderness seem to have made some impression on her. When he comes into the room she looks up and smiles;—when he speaks to her, she looks eagerly into his face as if she were straining every fibre of her poor brain to understand what he says; and

then murmurs rapidly—‘*Ah ! c’est ça !—Bien, bien ! mon petit François !*’ or ‘*Mais, oui, sans doute ! tu as raison, mon frère.*’ She rarely makes any other reply. I was surprised to find her dressed with scrupulous neatness, her fine hair arranged with great taste, and her gown fitting to admiration. She was seated by the open window of their little parlour, busily engaged in the manufacture of a head-dress of ribbon. When I watched the hands only, without looking at the face, I saw she was a clever milliner;—it is always a great pleasure to me to see hands moving dexterously at any sort of work. It struck me that she might be made to earn money, while she amused herself; and on our way home I proposed to Frederick that I should send her some millinery to do for me. He smiled sadly, and replied, that whatever I might send, and however clearly François might try to make her understand that the materials were to be made after this or that pattern, and for another person, poor Madeleine would appropriate them to herself. He told me that vanity and the love of dress,—feelings which had led to the loss of her reason,—still remained in full activity. In the worst stages of her illness she had never neglected her personal appearance; he had never seen her otherwise than *bien mise*. She devoted her whole time to dressing herself, sitting at the window to be admired, and altering her clothes to the newest fashion she saw in the streets.

“I consider poor Madeleine’s insanity but a few degrees stronger than that of Miss S——, who is always buying and altering dresses;—and who sees nothing in any assembly but the new fashions and materials. When her brother died the other day, she had no time to grieve, because ‘there was all her mourning to be selected,’ and ‘it was,’ she said, ‘a very troublesome business. She hardly knew what was proper to wear for a brother—whether two tucks of crape or three,’ etc. ‘However, it was a mercy she was *obliged* to think of these things, because it took her thoughts from the sad event!’ etc. The woman of the house where they lodge is very kind to her and her father: she prepares their meals, and takes charge of

them while François is at our house, which is from ten till five every day. Old De Merville must have been very handsome. He still shows a love of the art to which he devoted his early life; for he is always carving pieces of marble or common stone into the form of vine leaves and bunches of grapes. It seems that he will execute no other designs. His grapes and vine-leaves *in relief* are wonderfully beautiful; but I wish he would do something else. This love of the grape looks suspicious."

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## CHAPTER X.

### LITTLE MAGGIE HASTINGS.

"A little child! a limber elf!"

COLERIDGE.

ARUNDEL RABY was attacked by a severe illness a short time before the completion of his seventh year. The family was then at Carleton Castle.

My grandfather writes thus to his sister at that time.

"Dr. Ward walked down this morning to tell us that the child was rather better. Our young ones were gladdened by the news. Little Maggie immediately asked if she might go and see him. Her inquiry was so solemn and earnest, that we could not help smiling. The doctor patted her on the head, and said, 'Yes, my dear; very soon;' upon which she ran away (as we thought) to play. About two hours later, after the doctor had gone, and I was quietly seated in my study, Sophia came in, in some excitement, asking, 'Do you know anything of Maggie? She is nowhere to be found!' Seeing her uneasiness, I took up my hat and searched the garden, stable, and out-houses in vain. The servants and the other children were seeking, high and low, in the house, with a like result. After laughing at my wife's fears, I began to share them. As she is given to odd ways, delighting in doing what no other child of her age and sex would think of,

I looked up into trees, and on the angles of the walls. As I returned through the village, after a search, I met young Green, the keeper's son, and asked him if he had 'seen one of my children anywhere on the road.'

"He replied, that he had seen 'the little Missy with the brown eyes, away up in the park!'

"'In the park!' I exclaimed. 'What was she doing there?'

"'She was just toddling along, straight to the castle, sir,' he replied. 'I stared a bit to see such a little creature out by herself, you may be sure; and I went up to her, and asked where she was going. She looked at me for all the world like a brave little woman, with those *oncommon* eyes of hers, and she says quite demure: "*I'm going to a castle to see a ittle Dunny.*"'

"'God bless me!' I exclaimed. 'I hope you did not leave her, Green. She is much too young to go out by herself.'

"'Well, sir,' said the man, 'so *I* thought, and was for bringing her back; but *that* did not seem to suit her, at any price. She's got a will of her own, sir, that's clear; and a way of getting it, too, young as she is! The long and the short of the business is, that the little lady made me carry her up to the castle, instead of bringing her home. She prattled so pretty all the way about *ittle Dunny*, as she calls poor little Master Arundel, that I was quite sorry to part with her, as I did when I met the nursemaid walking with the young viscount. As soon as *he* saw little Missy, there was a grand shout on both sides, and I delivered Missy to Ann. Ann began to scold, but Missy persisted that *a doctor said a might come and see Dunny*; and then she began to cry,—pretty innocent!—and said she *must, indeed she must, see ittle Dunny*—*she loved him so, and was so sorry*. To pacify her, Ann made up her mind to take the child home to dine with them, and I promised to call at your house, sir, and tell them what had become of the young lady. I was just going there now.'

"I thanked the kind young man, and returned home with the news. In the afternoon I went off after the runaway, musing a little upon Sophia's last words—'She is little more



than five years old, and already gives more trouble than all the rest of the children put together !' Poor little Maggie ! I'm afraid she is gifted with an inconvenient and unlady-like amount of self-will and originality.

"On the present occasion it was difficult to scold, because, as it happened, her impromptu visit turned out a very opportune one.

"It seems that Dr. Ward had this morning observed symptoms of returning reason in the child, and was anxiously watching for their increase. It was during a critical sleep that the doctor walked down here. On his return he found his little patient still sleeping soundly, as he expected. He was prepared for the length and soundness of the sleep, but he was very uneasy about its result. He was by no means sure that the poor boy would not wake up a confirmed idiot. —He told me afterwards somewhat of his feelings, as he sat beside the bed, about the time he expected the sleep to pass off. He could scarcely bear to glance at the faces of the parents: the mother's wearing that indescribable look, made up of the intensest love and pity, mingled with painful, eager inquiry, which, he says, he sees so often in the faces of mothers as they watch the death-beds of their children; the father's face, downcast, wretched, but too proud to unbend the firm-set mouth,—or to let the lids droop over the expectant eye.

"Poor Carleton ! Dr. Ward observed, also, that he did not stand beside his wife, or offer her any consolation, and that she seemed to avoid looking at him; their whole souls seemed concentrated in the gaze with which they watched the little slumberer, who lay, wasted, wan, with the transparent lids only half covering his large eyes; the beautiful head, shorn of its abundant curls, resting on one small thin hand, while the other lay, clasped in his mother's, on the white coverlet. He had been thus for five hours. At length he stirred slightly—a tremor passed through his limbs. They who saw the motion trembled too. Then his eyes opened a little. And the thought came to all of them—'What if there be no longer any intelligence there?' At that moment there was a sound

of small pattering feet, and a child's voice outside the room sounding plaintively, and as if in the act of struggling.

"*Oh, let I do in! I will be dood. Please let I do see ittle Dunny!*"

"For half an instant a feeling of alarm at this disturbance, so near the silent chamber, contracts the brows of the watchers; but only for half an instant—the next it is converted into tearful joy. For at the sound of that voice the patient's eyes open wide; he raises his head, smiles, looks towards the door and then towards his mother, and says, in feeble, but glad accents: 'Little Maggie! Mamma, little Maggie!'

"The doctor says that he never admitted a visitor into a sick-room more willingly than he then admitted our little pet. At a sign from him, Carleton opened the bedroom door, and discovered Miss Maggie engaged in single combat with Ann, who was endeavouring to carry off the child. In another moment Maggie was free, and saw the door open before her. Without pausing, she ran into the sick-chamber, and Frank crept in after her. Dr. Ward says it was pretty to see her stop suddenly, smitten by the silence and darkness of the room, and then turn her head round slowly, in the gloom, as if in search of something. At last she seemed to make out the bed, and began to move towards it. When she was close to it, so that she could see its little tenant looking eagerly at her, she stretched out her arms towards him, and sobbed out '*Poor Dunny. Kiss ittle Maggie!*' The invalid testifying much impatience to comply with her request, she was lifted on the bed by Dr. Ward. He says that every one present shed tears at the sight of their innocent caresses. Arundel's pale face beamed with delight, while Maggie's fingers wandered over it, as if to make sure it was indeed her 'dear Dunny.' She seemed sadly puzzled about his *hair*—her eyes fixed themselves insatiably upon it in the dim light. And then feeling with her two little hands all over his head, she said, mournfully, '*A carls gone!*' Being told by Lady Carleton that she must sit quite still, and not talk, she immediately seated herself on the bed, so that she and her little friend could look at each other,

and remained immovable. Frank came and stood beside her, looking with awe-struck face at his brother, whom he had not seen for many days. Arundel put up his pale thin lips to kiss him, but poor Frank burst into tears, and hid his face in Maggie's frock. He is very fond of Arundel, and has been inconsolable during his illness. *He* is old enough to see the sad change in 'Dunny,' as they call him. He is a fine, noble little fellow. Dr. Ward would not suffer the two children to be removed until the patient seemed exhausted and inclined to sleep once more.

"Her mother says Maggie ought to have been a boy. That she is as bold as a redbreast; that she never seems to be afraid of anything. Not a bad quality for a woman, *that*. Fear is the mother of weakness: and weakness and wickedness are twins. If Maggie grows up a *brave* woman, I'll forgive her for running away from home in her fourth year.

"*Thursday*.—Arundel is slowly but surely recovering. Dr. Ward left the castle for London to-day. On his way to P—— he stopped here; and we had an hour's conversation. Lady Carleton's health is injured by her assiduous attention to the child; but there is a deeper cause for the great change which has taken place in her. From questions she put to the doctor, he fears she has some idea that Arundel's illness is *inherited*. He was able to prophesy good to her for his *boyhood*; at least for many years to come. He says there is every reason to hope, that, having passed this critical period safely, he will become strong physically and mentally. He assured her of this. He did not tell her what he has told me and Carleton; viz., that in seven more years, *i.e.*, about his fifteenth year, it is not unlikely the dear boy will suffer another obscuration of the intellect; and that that attack will be longer and probably more dangerous than the one from which he has just recovered. I asked the doctor *why* he had not warned Lady Carleton of this; and the gentle goodness and wisdom of his reply satisfied me on that score.

"'No warning could ward off the attack, I believe. When I find the evil creeping on, as it *will*, by slow and scarcely

perceptible steps, she shall be warned. In the meantime, if he should fall a victim to one of the thousand accidents which carry children to the grave, it will be well to have spared her the terrible prospect of that evil which he did not live to meet. We physicians are but too glad to save hearts from suffering when we can. He then asked to see all our children that he might ascertain if there were any ailment he could prescribe for among us. We could not muster one. I confess I looked with some pride upon our seven healthy children, who had nothing the matter with them. I thought the doctor, too, looked with satisfaction at the group, as he said—'It will be your own fault, youngsters, if you ever have much to do with doctors.' Of Maggie he took a special farewell. He seemed pleased with her, and prophesied that 'if she took great pains she might grow up *almost* as good as her aunt.'—I hope her aunt feels flattered."

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## CHAPTER XI.

LORD CARLETON.

"A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."  
*Proverbs of Solomon.*

A SHORT time after the date of the last letter to his sister, my grandfather writes to her as follows:

"Sophia and I dined at the castle to-day. The change in her ladyship is very evident. She is silent and sad,—she who is naturally talkative and merry. But what can I say of the change in Carleton? When we were alone I turned the conversation on his wife. For the first time, for I know not how long, he spoke to me in the old way.

"'Henry!' he exclaimed, 'what can I do? I stay in the room with her and the children till my brain burns, and I am obliged to leave them lest I should commit some act of madness. I *feel* the taint in my blood then! She is changed you say. Do I not know it? Do I not know the cause?' I cannot

bear to face the evil that is slowly coming on. She is ceasing to love, beginning to despise me—to look into my eyes for the cause of her child's malady. *If she should find it there?*

"He paused; and I was about to reply, 'Why not tell her the whole truth at once?' when I remembered Dr. Ward's warning; and knowing that the discussion of such a question would necessarily agitate him much, I determined to postpone it; and said, 'Dr. Ward was of opinion that Lady Carleton had no actual *knowledge* that there was insanity in the Raby family, and that by judicious management she need not be made aware of it for several years to come, if at all.'

"He laughed bitterly. 'Does the doctor know so little of women? They are all quick enough in discovering what concerns those they love, be it good or bad. She loves her child too well not to know that his disease is not common to all children.'

"I approached him by an irresistible impulse, and said, as I should have said twenty years ago: 'My dear friend, do at once the thing that is right. Do not sleep this night till you have told all to your wife.' He remained silent. 'Poor, proud, suffering heart!' I thought. I have been to blame in this matter, Margaret—much and grievously to blame! Poor Carleton! I have not done my duty by him. I see it all now. Since his marriage I have not sought—nay, rather have I shrunk from—any renewal of our old familiar heart-intercourse. He has felt this, and has taken refuge in the stronghold of his pride. We two, who were nearer and dearer than ordinary brothers, have not known each other's heart for ten years until to-day! This is assuredly my fault more than his. He knew my opinion on the question of marriage, for *him*. When I looked into his face I read something like *this* there. 'It is true. I admit it. I have done what my conscience does not approve entirely!—But no harm *may* come to any one. I will suffer no one, not even *you*, to accuse me of it. I do not ask for your approval; I abide by the consequences of my own acts.'

"Once, I remember, he said to me, as he pointed to his

children, 'Hastings, what say you, now? Do you think I ought to have been *the last* of my race?' Gratified pride and affection shone in every feature. Three weeks after that, little Arundel had his first fit!

"Since then Carleton has been slowly changing. He is careless about things of importance, runs after novelties, and neglects the duties which lie round about him. His bodily health has declined, and with it his mental vigour. He is evidently very unhappy. It is natural that I should dread an attack of the kind to which I once saw him a victim. The loving attentions of his wife seemed, hitherto, to have aggravated the evil. To be the sole cause of grief to her, is almost intolerable to him! He fears that her love will be changed into something like contempt, when she learns that *he was aware* that this fate might be hers in marrying him, and yet he never warned her. Would not her bitterest reproaches be just? He feels that they would; that he could have no excuse,—not even that poor one of a blind, headlong passion for herself. *That* he says, he never pretended; it was a *mariage de convenance*, in which Lady Morton was the principal agent. He says Caroline liked him and he liked her; but that they neither of them talked nor thought much of *loving*. Love has come since, strange to say!—and on both sides. Love for the wife whom he has helped to deceive; pity, the most intense pity, for her as a mother; his own grief as a father; the fear of some unknown and terrible form of the disease manifesting itself in this gifted boy,—these feelings, with an ever-present sense of having acted unworthily—of having failed in securing his object—battle incessantly in the brain and heart of my poor friend. I have long suspected this; yet I could not break through the wall of reserve which has grown up between us until this day. Thank God! we have met once more, heart to heart.

"I cannot set down all that passed between us; but this unburdening of the heart has done him good, I am sure—perhaps, stayed the progress of the disease, which, he fears, is creeping on himself. I advised, entreated him to seek an explanation with his wife—to trust to her love and generosity.

He shrunk from such counsel. Could not even see that it was the most politic, as well as the right, course. Is it not true, that if we weaken our moral discipline, we, at the same time, endanger the brightness of our intellectual faculties? Carleton is now in the prime of his age; but this one great misdeed has weighed down his whole being, and prevented its natural growth. He is not what he might have been, and he knows it; though he astonished me to-day by saying that 'perhaps, upon the whole, he had got as much good out of life as if he had adhered to the semi-Quixotic system of self-denial he had once laid down for himself.' Surely there is something wrong in his brain when he can take up the specious unreason of that philosophy which calls virtue *Quizotism*!"

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## CHAPTER XII.

A HUSBAND'S CONFESSION—THE HEIR IN PERIL—THE TAINT IN THE BLOOD.

"She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life."  
*Proverbs.*

THE next letter bears the date of the following day.

"A note from Lady Carleton came to me early this morning, begging that I would come to the castle as soon as possible, and see his lordship, who was not well, and had expressed a desire to speak with me. I delayed not a moment; but rode up through the park as fast as possible, fearing the worst.

"On reaching the castle, I asked to see her ladyship. She was alone in her private room. Alone, and, for a wonder, unemployed. I think she had been weeping. There was a marked cordiality in her greeting, though there was no gladness in it. She thanked me for coming immediately—said that Lord Carleton 'had been ill'—'over-excited'—'feverish'—the previous night, and that she had taken advan-

tage of his wish to see me to request that I would take notice of the state of his health, and if I thought it advisable, she would write to Dr. Ward on the subject.

"There was confidence in me, and a certain dignified reserve upon the subject of her suspicion, in the look which she gave me then, which I could not but admire. I said, at once, that 'it was fortunate that she felt trust in me; that I understood Carleton's constitution better than he did, and that I could soon ascertain whether Dr. Ward's interference was necessary,—if I could prevail upon him to tell me exactly what ailed him. But that would be difficult;—as he was one of those men who would never admit that he had an ailment until he was prostrated by it.' After hearing a favourable account of both the children, I left her, and went to the library.

"Carleton was there. At first I did not see him; for he was standing in the embrasure of a window, looking out over the park,—being, it seems, struck by the extraordinary beauty and freshness of the morning, as I had been. I approached him, and we shook hands in silence. His mournful eyes flashed upon me suspiciously, as he said :

"*'You were sent for?'*

"*'Yes. Lady Carleton wrote a line to say that you had been unwell last night, and had expressed a wish to see me. Are you better this morning?'*

"*'Did she tell you anything of what passed last night?'* he inquired suddenly, without replying to my question.

"*'No; she is anxious about your health. You must take care of yourself, or let her and others take care of you. You are not well.'*

"He glanced at me, but said nothing. I don't think he understood my words; his mind was pre-occupied. He passed his arm through mine, and led me close to the window. 'Is not that a fine prospect?' he asked.

"*'Yes. I have stopped a dozen times on the road this morning to ask myself the same question!'*

"He smiled. 'It is a glorious place!—I cannot bear to go from it!'



"'But you are not going away yet. I'm sure London can do without you better than Carleton.'

"He said nothing; but gazed intently into the distance. Presently he turned to me, and said—'How is Margaret?'

"I was surprised, as we never speak of you. 'She was well when we last heard from her,' I replied, in an indifferent tone; not wishing to irritate his mind.

"'Well! Yes—those who *do* well always *are* well!—But, Hastings,—those who do better than well,—those who are capable of something higher and nobler than mere conformity with a rule because they see that it is prudent—such people are not always *well*! They suffer through their affections; they do not become mere machines for the working out of a principle; but are content to leave the principle on its own low ground of expediency, and spreading the wings of a noble impulse, ascend to a region whither those others can never follow them. It is a loftier region: one more exposed to the pelting of the pitiless storms of life, certainly; but it is one in which a generous soul breathes more freely than in the narrow, well-sheltered garden of expediency.'

"'I do not quite understand to what this applies!' I said, smiling, and glad to go off into generalities. 'But if you mean to say that mediocrity is not excellence—that to be "content to live in decencies for ever" is not as honourable as striving after the crown of virtue, I am obliged to agree with you;—though with regret,—for few things are more insipid to my taste than a platitude. If, on the contrary, you wish me to swallow a paradox, I'm afraid I can't oblige you. I do *not* think it less easy or less virtuous to live according to principle than it is to indulge our impulses. Good and charming as our impulses often are, I do not conceive it is highly meritorious to give them way.'

"'Have I been talking nonsense?' he asked.

"'Either that, or something worse!'—and I smiled.

"'Common-place?'—and he tried to smile too.—'I will tell you what I was thinking of. Caroline and I had some conversation last night.' Here he turned away from me, and

looked over the park, with a wandering, uncertain gaze. I did not like the expression of his face at all;—it strengthened my fears. I wished to turn the conversation; yet it was not possible to do so then without exciting him more, perhaps, than the expression of his feelings would do. I drew close to him and listened. All the time he was speaking his eyes roamed incessantly over the varied expanse of sky and wood, lake and green sward, fixing themselves intently, for a moment or so, on any moving object—deer, or bird, or passing horseman.

“Last night I went to speak to Caroline. Your advice dwelt in my mind. I acted on it—after long deliberation. It was late. Every one had retired to rest. I had been in my room some time; but had not thought of lying down. Of late I cannot sleep, and hate to lie down; finding more repose in walking to and fro in my room. Suddenly I felt the courage to go and speak to Caroline. If I did not speak *then*, I could never speak at all. I had subdued my pride for the moment. I snatched up the lamp, and went into the cabinet which connects our chambers. There was no sound within hers. I hesitated—“She is asleep, perhaps. After these long weary weeks of fatigue it would be selfish to disturb her; especially for such a purpose. I will speak to-morrow!” Will you believe it, Hastings? I, whose fault is not that of deliberating too long—whose motto of action, as you once said, is “*gedacht, gethan!*”—I stood for five minutes, debating with myself whether I should or should not enter my wife’s room. At last, from mere shame and anger at my absurd indecision, I knocked suddenly and sharply on the door.

“To my surprise her voice was heard immediately—“Come in;”—she, who used to sleep so soundly that no knocking awakened her!

“She was in bed, and reading, with a lamp beside her. I caught sight of the book as she put it beneath the pillow; it was a small Bible I gave her long ago. I set down my own lamp, and removed hers, that I might seat myself in the fauteuil beside her; observing, in my usual tone, that “it

made me uneasy to find that she still persisted in the bad habit of reading in bed." She did not remonstrate, as she used to do, in a pretty, lively way; urging a dozen reasons in favour of the habit, each worse than the last, but all impossible for a man to combat while she made him laugh. No! That is all gone now! Poor Caroline!

"She said nothing; and as I put aside the curtain to speak to her, the light fell on her face. She had been weeping;—there was no use in trying to hide it; so she smiled faintly, as her head sunk wearily on the pillow, and stretching out a hand to me, she said:

"“Don't think anything of my tears, Frederick. I am weak and foolish, that is all! You are right: I ought to have been asleep. But how is it *you* are not in bed, and you were so ill to-day? I was told you were gone to bed long since.”

"“There was none of the usual sweetness in her manner. She said all this because she wished to hide some strong feeling. *Was it dislike of myself?* The thought chilled me, and I let fall her hand. She observed the action, and looked at me for a moment; then raising herself on her elbow, so as to see me better, she said:

"“What is it, Frederick? You have come here to tell me something! I am your wife; remember, I can and ought to bear anything you have to communicate. Try me!”

"“Oh, Hastings! That word *ought!* How it pierced me! Yes! It was clear she had been thinking of her *duties* as a wife—she had determined that she would be true to her own conceptions of right. It was pride—the pride of social position; perhaps, too, the religious feeling which helps women so much in the performance of a difficult moral duty: it was these which made her calm and ready to listen to anything I might have to reveal or to command. It was not *love*—there was no love in the tone of her voice. She was kind, but cold.

"“Oh, how I felt the change! It pained, but it hardened me. I was the better able to fulfil my task. Leaning back

in the chair, then, and closing my eyes—for I could not bear to look on that pale, anxious face, which bent forward to catch my words—I began in a steady voice, and told her all.'

"'All?' I inquired, somewhat astonished.

"'Yes,' he replied. 'I make no half confidences. She knows all, now. The family disease; my father's life; my own attack of *insanity* in youth (I like to give things their proper names); my passionate love for your sister, and her wise rejection of me. You will not quarrel about *that* term! The event has proved how judicious was her decision. But there was one truth which my wife ought to know—which she, perhaps, suspects—and which I was cowardly enough to shrink from telling her. I did not tell—(and here he turned his face full upon me)—I did not tell her that I feel within my brain—have long felt it coming—a return of the disorder which you remember attacked me once. That is *my* form of the family curse.'

"'You are over-excited just now,' said I; 'a sudden alarm, such as that which caused your attack years ago, might, in your present state, bring on another; but there is no reason to anticipate anything of the kind. Tell me, are you not easier than you were? Did not Lady Carleton receive your communications as I expected she would?'

"The questions seemed to please, and yet to make him sadder than before. He replied thus:

"'How little we men know of women, till we put their deepest feelings to the proof! I told my story with a presentiment that she, having before suspected part of it, had changed the love she once had for me into something like contempt and personal dislike. I had got this idea during the late perils of the child, whose existence was scarcely more precious to her than his wonderful mental endowments.

"'I did not look at her during all that painful confession. At length I ceased, with words somewhat like these:—'And now, Caroline, you know what I have done, and what a curse I have brought upon you! I do not talk to you any more as a husband. I claim no love, no duty from you. You were

deceived in me; you loved a noble and true man, not one who could allow himself to be guilty of a cheat, and make you and those dearest to you its victims!"

"He paused a moment and glanced towards me; then looked away again, into the distance, as if something attracted his attention there.

"Then he resumed speaking, thus: 'Hastings, I hardly know how to tell you what followed; it is so sacred and dear to my heart! Still you ought to know. You *shall* know how strong and self-sacrificing "a mere woman"—"a beauty"—"a woman of fashion"—as she is called, can be! Not one of the lofty moral principled women, mark you! And *that* without an effort—for it *was* without an effort. Oh, thank God, it came spontaneously! It was not done upon a *principle*.

"She interrupted me with outstretched arms. She drew me towards her. She could not speak for tears; but her kisses were showered on my cold hands and fevered brow; on this insensible hair even, through which her fingers wandered nervously, while, overcome with my own feelings and hers, I rested my head on her bosom. Then she whispered fond epithets in low broken tones; each word simple—exaggerated, as it would sound in other ears—was a cordial to me; for I was faint and sick with the solitude of my own remorseful heart, and its chilling fear that there was henceforth no sweet love for me on this earth. It was a blessed thing to clasp her in my arms once more—to feel that she loved me, in spite of all! I said so; and it was then her true womanly soul flashed forth. She held me back from her, and looking into my face, with a grave, loving smile, said:

"*"Frederick! I see there are many ways of loving, and loving well. I have my way, as well as grander and wiser folks. I tell you truly, as sure as you hold me now, so sure is it that I rejoice with all my soul that I am your wife! I am too happy to have something to bear for your sake; too happy to be so bound to you that all the powers of this world,*

not even your own will, could set me free again! I am deeply glad to have added, as you say I have added, to your happiness; glad, even in the darkest depths of our affliction, to be permitted to share it with you. Glad am I, heartily glad, to have in some way helped the fulfilment of your desire. Remember, love, you have an heir, one who will uphold the family name and honour. I *know* it, I am *sure* of it! One child may be a source of pain to you; the other will bring nothing but joy and noble pride to your heart. Do not talk of regret for the past! There is nothing to regret. 'I ought to have been warned!' say you? I thank my God that I was *not* warned. Had I been warned, I should not have been yours; for I did not know what love meant till after I was your wife. I thank God I was not warned; or I might have shrunk from being yours, because you were *stricken by Him!*'"

"Suddenly he stopped speaking. His face was livid, his eyes wildly staring; his hand shook like that of one palsied, as he pointed to something out in the park, while he gasped forth an inarticulate sound. I looked, and forgot everything but what I saw—

"A young horse, with the little viscount on his back, was tearing across the park, pursued by a groom. On went the fiery animal, dashing past trees, whose lower branches the child escaped as by a miracle—rearing, plunging, turning suddenly, playing every dangerous trick that horses are wont to play in order to throw off a rider. It is a mystery to me, now, how the boy kept his seat, though he says he 'was not afraid.' Carleton uttered no further sound till we saw the creature suddenly dart towards the lake. The descent to it is precipitous in that part. On dashed the horse, and plunged down the bank out of our sight, but certainly into the deep water. Then Carleton gave a groan, and sank on the floor.

"The young French secretary was in the next room. I ran to find him, and we raised my poor friend, and placed him on a couch. He was still insensible, and I left François with

him while I went to learn the result of the accident to the child, hoping that his mother had not seen it. I ran out towards the lake; and in a short time my fears were relieved by seeing some people approach from that direction, and in the midst of them the little viscount—drenched, but unhurt, and not much frightened. He is a fine, brave child! I hurried him to the house—to the door of the library—that his father might see him as soon as he opened his eyes. But I heard sounds when I opened the door which made me send the boy away.

"I entered alone. It was as I feared. Carleton's reason was gone. He sat up, laughing and talking wildly to François, who understood what was the matter, and whose face wore a look of mingled horror and affection.

"I went to the countess. She is, indeed, very different from what I once thought. In less than ten minutes our plans were arranged and in process of execution. She ran to see her husband. He did not know her. Asked who was '*that lady!*' Oh, that beautiful face of hers! How pale, how awe-stricken it was! But she retained presence of mind, and spoke a few words to François. He was to go with her and the earl to Dr. Ward immediately, if he would.

"'*Mais certainement! Si madame le veut,*' he replied quietly.

"The carriage was already ordered. In a quarter of an hour I stood with Miss Price at the hall-door, and saw it drive down the avenue, on its way to P——. Lady Carleton took her maid and two men-servants, who rode outside, and François de Merville, who rode inside with her and my poor friend, who was then perfectly quiet and harmless, sinking fast into a state of stupor. She grasped my hand convulsively as we parted, and I noticed that her fair face was colourless and almost stern as she pressed her lips to poor Miss Price's cheek. Fortunately, the whole of the servants' hall were so occupied with the narrow escape of the viscount this morning, that no one of them but the maid and the two men who went with the carriage have the slightest idea of the cause of this sudden journey. I do not think it can be kept secret long;

but as Lady Carleton is very desirous that it should not be known, we shall do all we can to conceal it. Frank is none the worse for his ride and ducking this morning; but Sam, the groom, who had been showing him the new horse, is terribly afraid of being dismissed. He was not to blame, I find from Frank himself, who never tells a lie. The boy, it seems, got on the horse (after repeated warnings from the man not to do so) when no one was watching him, and of course the animal darted off out of the stable-yard directly, to the consternation of poor Sam.

"'Never mind, Sam,' said the child, when I came to make an inquiry into the origin of the accident; 'I'll tell Mr. Hastings all about it. I was a naughty boy. Sam said *don't* ever so many times, and I said *I would*, and I *did*. I got on Scamp. Scamp ran away, and got in the water, and I got wet. Don't let papa scold Sam when he comes home!' I could not help kissing the boy; and I assured Sam that he should not lose his place."

\* \* \* \* \*

A great change took place in consequence of the Earl of Carleton's sudden illness. Within a fortnight after the events just related, the castle was shut up, and the whole family was transported to London, as Lady Carleton wished to be near her husband, who was placed under Dr. Ward's care. Her letters of business to the steward at Carleton, and to the manager of her own valuable estates at North Ashurst, seem to have been written at the suggestion of my grandfather. She writes to him as to a brother; and reports minutely the progress of the earl's case. Her brother, Mr. Morton, lived with her for some time. At the end of six months, the earl's recovery was announced. His return to his family seems to have been a source of joy to every member of it. My grandfather was invited to join in their happiness. He went to London, and found his friend in a sound state of mind; but so weak in body, that Dr. Ward had ordered him to the south of France, or to Italy, for the winter. The peace of Amiens had just opened the Continent to the English. As Lord



Carleton could not bear the idea of parting again from his family, Lady Carleton decided at once that she and the children should travel with him. My grandfather and François were found of great use in making the necessary arrangements for the journey; the earl himself taking a lively interest in all that went on, though confined to the house by the doctor's orders. The travelling party consisted of the earl and countess and Miss Price, the two children, François de Merville, the nurses, and my lady's maid, besides men-servants. One of these was named Maddox; he was a young man from Dr. Ward's establishment, accustomed to the management of the insane. It was by Lord Carleton's own desire that this young man accompanied them. He wished to take every precaution in case of another attack.

This Maddox was the same person who used to walk up and down the terrace beneath Lord Arundel's apartments when I was a child, and whose business there puzzled me so much. When the family went abroad, Maddox was placed under the direction of François; and was found very useful in many ways, as the countess reports in her letters from Italy, being "a well-conducted, obliging person," who spoke "French and Italian well enough to act as interpreter-general for the servants," and who was "so attached to the children, especially to Arundel, that she was never at all uneasy when she knew they were with him or François." Maddox has ever since maintained a high character in the family. His professional services, as I find from the countess's letters, were happily not required during the three years the earl remained abroad. During that time he married Ann the nurse; and as his natural talents and miscellaneous acquirements were valued by the earl, he was retained in the household. It would not be easy to say, in one word, what office Maddox occupied; but the earl always considered him indispensable. He excelled in many exercises; rode, drove, and swam well; had a mechanical turn; was a good deal of a carpenter, and somewhat of a chemist; there was no trade of which he had not some knowledge; and wherever he went his faculties were

on the alert to acquire new information. He was fond of children, and delighted in imparting his acquirements. François de Merville also devoted much time to the children; and besides acquiring the habit of talking French and Italian fluently, they learnt much from him. Miss Price and their mother taught them to read English and to write. Thus, without having a regular tutor, at so early an age, the Viscount Merle and his brother learned practically many useful things, before they were ten years old—things which boys of the lower and middle-classes learn, and which awaken the mental faculties while they exercise the body.

"Being thoroughly satisfied with the good sense and moral worth of Maddox," writes the countess to my grandmother, soon after their arrival at Turin, "we are quite contented to see him carry off the boys every morning to an *atelier*, where something is going on which interests them. At present, the *furor* is for silk reeling, in a factory close by. It is amusing to see Maddox, with his tall herculean frame, striding up the hilly road, and my two darlings bounding along on each side of him, taking five steps to his one, and performing a great many unnecessary digressions in order to get rid of their animal spirits. I must not omit to put up a small flake of spun silk which Arundel brought home to-day, and exhibited to me with great delight, because it 'was exactly like little Maggie's hair.' He has not a very bad eye for colour, you will see, and has not yet forgotten his favourite. It is a nearer approach to the 'paly gold' of my god-daughter's locks than any flax. By the way, I wish you would not keep her hair so closely cut. I know you will say it is convenient for a clergyman's daughter to have short hair, as long curls require so much time and pains to keep in nice order. But long 'carls,' as Maggie says, 'are so pretty!' and really she has quite an old-fashioned, puritan look. A little, fair-haired Roundhead, with dark brown eyes and eyebrows! She would look much prettier if you would consent to let her hair grow long. You will say that the outward adornment does not belong to my office of godmother. Still, I protest against your making her a fright!"

I was somewhat puzzled by the fact that François de Merville should accompany Lord and Lady Carleton abroad, until I found two letters from the countess to her sister, written before the earl's attack at Carleton, in one of which she gives an account of the deaths of old De Merville and Madeleine. They were carried off by fever within a week of each other. In the other, dated some weeks after, she writes thus :

“François is recovering his health and equanimity. High spirits he never had. He now forms one of our household; and, as he is well educated, and has a passion for books, Frederick finds him invaluable as a librarian and *thinking* factotum. He writes confidential French letters, takes charge of books and papers, and reads to him. Besides this, he performs, of his own accord, half the duties of a *bonne* to the boys, who seem to think him born for the express purpose of amusing them. They already speak French with delightful inaccuracy. François seems to love them, now, better than any one in the world except ‘Milor.’ Milor’s goodness to poor Madeleine seems to have elevated him to the rank of an archangel in François’ estimation. Frederick *has* a charming way of conferring obligations; and I have no doubt he really did some great service to the De Mervilles, though he has never told me a word of the matter.”

After I found these letters, I was no longer surprised that François travelled with them; or that the earl himself should speak thus of him, in a letter addressed to my grandfather, dated from Malta, 1804, about three years after their departure from England. They had been driven to that island by the renewal of hostilities with France. The earl was a personal friend of Sir Alexander Ball, who had the command of Malta at that time; and as the countess felt safe from Bonaparte there, they were in no hurry to return to England until a very safe opportunity presented itself.

“You are surprised to find that I have not engaged an

English tutor, here, for the boys. To say the truth, I am somewhat unconventional on the important subject of education. I do not believe that *learning to read*, even in his own language, is the first step proper to be taken by every boy; and still less learning to read in a foreign language. It would not trouble me much, if Frank and Arundel could not read English now, when they are just ten years old. They have been learning other things quite as useful as the alphabet. You have no idea how much manual dexterity they have acquired from Maddox, and how much practical knowledge they have. They take an interest in most handicrafts; this gives them sympathy with the craftsmen, remember. The French revolution has opened my eyes upon many subjects: among others, upon the necessity for the abolition of class-prejudices—among us who do not labour for daily bread especially. The men of *my* order must stand by the men of the people. To do this, our children must have a far more liberal education than we had. They must learn how the people work—they must be able to understand them. Maddox is a man of the people—a good, clever fellow, and François de Merville is somewhat aristocratic. These two men have not been engaged as tutors; but the boys have learned from them what they would never have learned from any reverend college professor. First, such things as call forth their senses and perceptive powers—such things as exercise their bodies—such things in short, as *all* men, in every station, ought to know. After these shall come the education peculiar to the men of the station and country in which they happen to be born. Frank and Arundel shall go to Eton as soon as we return, and I have no doubt they will ultimately make a fair figure there. At present, they know little of Latin; but I have carried them through the first half of the Eton grammar, and made them *comprehend* a good deal of it, which is more than I could do when I was two years older than they. You ask, in some alarm, what they can do ‘besides eat macaroni’? I believe they can explain to you how it is made, and I know they can boil it. Besides this, you must know that they can swim like fish—ride well—walk eight

miles and not feel fatigued—they can climb, leap, and run capitably. They can speak fairly and very fluently in French, Italian, and English; and read tolerably in those languages too. Books were never forced upon them; but they both showed an early desire to read. They both sing easy music at sight very correctly, and have sweet voices. They have been allowed to sing in the choir of one of the churches here, to their great delight. Their love of music is very strong still, and it has been gratified fully since they came to Italy. They go to an early mass with François every morning, and, Protestant as we are, neither their mother nor I can forbid the gratification of this pure taste. It sounds quite comico to hear young *English* children talk about Mozart's or Haydn's mass in this or that key. The names of Palestrina and Pergolese are familiar in their mouths as household words. Frank is a famous hand at repeating poetry—and—the multiplication table. They are both fine healthy-looking children. Frank is the handsomer and stronger, but Arundel has no appearance of disease about him. Arundel is decidedly a *genius*, his mother says!"

Not long after this letter was written, the Earl of Carleton and his family and suite returned to England. "We are happy to inform our readers," says an old morning paper which I found wrapped round a bundle of letters, "that the Earl of Carleton is in as perfect health as when he left England. He took part in the debate last night, and made a brilliant speech, which will be found fully reported in another column.

"The Countess of Carleton is also quite recovered from the disorder which caused her to leave our damp climate for the genial air of the south three years ago. She has resumed her place in the starry hemisphere of fashion; and last evening received a large party of friends, who thronged eagerly to the house to do honour to her return, and congratulate her on her restoration to health. She has brought, it is reported, some valuable specimens of Italian pottery to add to her collection."

Shortly after, I find a brief note from the earl to my grandfather, begging him to come to London for a few days. The chief object of the visit seems to have been to take the two boys to Eton, and to see "James" (*i.e.* my father), who had been there already two years. The viscount and Mr. Arundel are to have lodgings, with François to take charge of them; James is removed from his boarding-house to live with them, at the earl's special request; and as my grandfather says, in a letter to his sister, "to the great delight of the three boys. Frank and Arundel," he adds, "are sure to find the advantage of having a boy of fourteen for their friend on their first introduction to that new world." He seems to have been much pleased with the travelled children, pronouncing them, in every respect, superior to the generality of boys. "They are sure to do well!" he says. "God in mercy avert from that sweet child the doom which Dr. Ward prognosticated for him! The doctor is pleased with his appearance *now*, and attributes much good to the style of education the earl has adopted. It is a natural one, he says. If that be the case, how unnatural is what is called a *good education*! Certainly these boys are all that one could wish: but then, I cannot forget that they are naturally superior to most of the boys I ever saw—except their father."

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**PART III.**  
**PARENTS AND CHILDREN.**





## CHAPTER I.

### THE FAMILY AT THE RECTORY.

"Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
Heaven did a recompense as largely send."

GRAY.

IT fell upon a day—the last of July, 18\*\*—that there was unwonted stir and bustle at Carleton Rectory. The young folks had a holiday; James was expected home from Eton for the last time (being in his nineteenth year); and all the hay in the rector's two fields was to be carried and stacked before night. It was about noon, and all the family was resting under the great walnut-tree in one of the fields, while the professional haymakers ate their dinners in the distance, and looked picturesque. The Hastings family looked picturesque, too, only in a more polite fashion. Mrs. Hastings and her eldest daughter, Sophia, *the beauty*—were seated on the top of a hay-cock, with the trunk of a tree rising close behind them. Mrs. Hastings wore the Moslem head-dress, then the *mode* among middle-aged Christian ladies. Her turban was of white muslin, and her gown was blue. Sophia's gown was white, and the only ornament of her head (in every sense) was the pride of her heart—her long auburn ringlets. As both these ladies were dignified and elegant, they were frightened at creeping things, and had spread a shawl between their persons and the hay; and as this shawl happened to be of a dingy red, it improved the colour of the group. Master Tom and little Clara in rustic costumes, and papa in a black frock-coat, lay at the feet of the ladies. Mr. Hastings stretched his listless length there, and was happy. A straw hat was beside him. He lay on his back and gazed up into the rustling branches of the tree—thinking of things I will not venture to indicate because I do not know. He had, at Clara's special request, put his head into her lap. But he soon began to perceive that his pillow had disadvantages. Little Clara was quiet for some time, awed by the "honourable load" which encumbered her knees: but in ten minutes

the awe began to pass away, and she showed symptoms of mistaking papa for a gigantic doll. First, she begged leave to cover his face with a handkerchief, tucking it down tightly to keep him "from catching cold;" so that he was fain to remonstrate against such suffocating kindness.

"Clara, my pet, I can't breathe!" gasped the half-stifled rector.

"Never mind, papa, dear! You look so funny! There, then!" letting loose a corner of the handkerchief. "There's a corner for you to breathe through. Now lie still, you good, dear, darling papa, and let me hush you to sleep!"

"But, my dear child, I don't want to go to sleep. I can't have that thing over my face any longer. I want to look about me. There! Give me a kiss. Ah! now I can see you, and mamma, and Sophia, and Tom. But where are Maggie and Naldo, and William Grey? I don't see them."

"Oh, they are just *there*, a little farther round the tree, papa." Clara was quiet for a minute, and then the sound of a girl's voice reading aloud was heard on the other side of the tree. It was Margaret, or as my aunt was called in her youth, *Maggie* Hastings, reading to William Grey and her little crippled brother Reginald.

Reginald—little Naldo, as he was called—was in early infancy the pride of his mother, for he had been more beautiful than all her other children: now, he was beloved beyond them all, for he was grievously afflicted with physical weakness and deformity. When Dr. Ward could not find an ailment in all my grandfather's family, Reginald was but four years old. Very soon after, a fall from a tree injured his spine, and at the age of ten he was dwarfed and crippled in his lower limbs, and his poor little body was frightfully twisted. His arms, on the contrary, grew strong, and his hands were well shaped. His head grew large, and the brain was very active; while the features lost their prettiness, and looked old. The vital power seemed to have concentrated itself in the brain and hands. He was precociously intelligent, and showed a power of skilful and delicate manipulation that was extraordinary.

He played cleverly on the violin. His mother loved him with a love unspeakable. But *that* was its fault—it was unspeakable and unspoken. The child soon knew that he was unlike other children. He had a soul eager for love and sympathy, and he did not meet with it where it should have been found, welling forth as a refreshing fountain, from which he might drink at all times. Mrs. Hastings acted upon a mistaken principle with her little child. She concealed from him as much as she could the difference between him and others: and, therefore, never allowed herself to condole with him on his privations. She did not encourage him to confide his griefs or his repinings to her; she was uniformly kind, and gentle, and forbearing with him; but she was never tender nor sympathetic in manner. She dreaded to show him what she felt, lest she should awaken in him a consciousness of the truth, and thus cause a suffering which she believed he would escape—at least in childhood—if she and those about him refrained from the expression of their pity for him. Alas! poor mother! she must have put a strong check upon her heart. None but her husband knew how dearly she loved Reginald. That love was the only *passion* of her life. It was an exquisitely painful pity—a timid reverence for the affliction of the child of her bosom, which threw, as strong passion so often does, a restraint or an unnaturalness into her manner. She was never playful with him; she could not lift smilingly that poor distorted body; she could not talk gaily to him the childish nonsense that soothes a childish ear, for the tears came up into her throat as she saw his feeble signs of merriment. At such times she would look upon him with a sad kind of awe, praying internally that God would “temper the wind to her shorn lamb;” and the child, seeing only the grave face, mistook the sadness for severity. By degrees, little Reginald shrank from his grave mother, who eyed him so seriously; and took refuge with Margaret, *the wag* of the family.

He loved to be with Maggie, because she made him laugh, and sang to him, and told him funny tales, and listened to the tales he told in return. But besides her drollery, Maggie had

qualities which Reginald, like most sensitive children, discovered very early—she had unselfish habits, and a generous, warm heart. He could unfold his little griefs to her—talk to her about himself, and his difference from other people. He could sit in her lap and weep on her shoulder, because he was not able to run about with the others, and because he was “so ugly.”

“Oh, yes,” he would say, on such occasions, “he knew he *was* ugly. He often looked in the glass to see. Oh! It was all very well for her to say that people would love him just the same, though he was ugly. He knew better than that, though! *She* might, perhaps; but other people would not. *How* did he *know* they would not? Oh, very well. He knew by their faces. Besides, he knew by himself. He did not like people that were ugly. He did not like William Grey—he was so ugly.”

“Then he could not like her,” his sister observed.

“Oh, it’s different about *you*, Maggie; you are my own, own sister. But you won’t mind my saying so, will you, dear? I *do* wish, very often, that you were pretty; as pretty as Sophia.”

On the day of the hay-making, as Margaret and Naldo were waiting for his little chaise to draw him into the hay-field, they happened to get upon this very subject, and he wished again that Margaret “looked as nice and pretty as Sophia. Her cheeks were too red! Her arms and neck were too tanned! If she would take care of herself, she might grow up as pretty as Sophy.”

Margaret laughed at him, and said, “That if it would please him she would certainly try and grow up pretty; but of all the people she ever knew, there was not one who thought so much about good looks as he did. There were Lord Merle and Arundel Raby, great big boys now, more than fourteen years old,—they had lived in Italy, where the people were all beautiful, they said; and in London, and at Eton, and Windsor, where they saw numbers of fine and handsome people:—and then, they saw each other—and Naldo would allow that *that* was a beautiful sight?”

"Ah, yes!" said Naldo. "If one could find a good fairy to make us as strong, and graceful, and beautiful as they are!"

"And yet, when they come down to the castle in the holidays, and come here for their lessons with us, they don't seem to think only about the beautiful ones."

"Oh, no!" said Naldo. "They seem to like you better than Sophia, though she is so much older, and quite a pretty girl—so tall and straight, and such beautiful ringlets. But then, Maggie, you are clever at lessons, and are able to do some of the things they do, and I suppose they like that."

"Oh, no, they don't, though!" laughed Maggie, merrily. "At least Frank didn't like my being able to construe the *Æneid* as well as himself the last holidays."

Naldo laughed too. "*Better*, you mean, Maggie. Papa said that you translated Virgil a great deal better than Lord Merle. You, a girl, too! No. He got very red when you took his place. He didn't like that, I am sure. He thought it a disgrace."

"I don't see why it should be," replied Maggie. "It would be an odd thing, I think, if I *couldn't* translate Virgil, when I've been taught Latin by such a Latinist as papa, almost ever since I could read. Now, Frank never began Latin properly till he was more than ten years old. I wish I knew French and Italian as he and Arundel Raby do! If Sophia and I had gone to a London boarding-school, like Charlotte Grey, we should have been learning French instead of Latin all this time, and the wiseacres hereabouts would not see anything wonderful in young ladies learning French! If we could translate Racine better than the boys, nobody would hold up hands in astonishment. Now, I'm sure Racine is ten times more difficult than Virgil. French puzzles me very much."

"That's because it's as strange and new to you as Latin is to other girls. But what were you going to say about my caring so much for good looks, and Lord Merle and his brother not seeming to think about them?"

"Why, that is precisely what I was going to say, Naldo.

They, and James (he is very handsome, and strong and active too, you know), and Lady Carleton."

"Ah, she *is* beautiful!" exclaimed Naldo. "How I love to look at her!"

"Well, dear, none of them seem to mind when people are not beautiful. They like them all the same as if they were; it does not make any difference in their liking. They like me, and they like you very much. It would not be quite kind or fair to judge of people only by their looks. Little children do that; but when we grow older we find that plain people—ugly people—are often more lovable than pretty and graceful ones. Now, all the people we love best happen to be good-looking—papa, mamma, Lady Carleton, James, Lord Merle, and Arundel Raby—and yet they never speak about good looks. I don't think they ever think about what sort of eyes, and hair, and complexions, and figures people have, as *you* do. You seem to think so much about the outside of people. I'm sure it is a bad habit to encourage. You will get not to like people who are not pretty; and that is wrong. Suppose I, or the rest of us, were to begin to dislike you, because you are not straight?" And Maggie laughed.

A dark glance shot from Naldo's eye for a moment, but Maggie's laugh was so full of pleasant scorn at the idea, that Naldo laughed too, and kissed her. He was the better for the laugh and the kiss. "*You* never would do that," he said.

"I should think not, indeed! Now, I'll tell you a little thought that has come into my mind lately.—Really, beautiful people don't generally care much about beauty in their friends and husbands and wives. You know the old Greek story about Venus being married to Vulcan. But ugly people like me—(well, *plain* if you like it best; but it's only a polite word for ugly!)—and deformed people like *you* generally think a great deal too much about good looks—we think them of more importance than they really are. Just as poor people think—Oh, if they had but a great deal of money, how much happier they would be!—how much admired and respected!—and just as sick persons envy those in health. It comes

from envy and vanity—I am sure it does, Naldo. You must leave off caring so much for pretty faces, and so must I.”

“I don’t think *you* care for them very much,” said Naldo, looking at her, after a pause in which he had been carefully taking in what she said. “You are a great deal too careless about your frock and your hair to think much about how you look, or you might make yourself look a great deal better than you do. Whoever saw a girl turned thirteen, and as tall as you are, going about in that style? Lord Merle said you were not a bit like any other girl last holidays.”

“I don’t care a bit for what Lord Merle said,” replied Maggie, quickly. “If mamma does not think I am too big for trousers and a short frock, I need not care; and I am sure, Naldo dear,” she replied, recovering her temper immediately, and smiling, “you would not say a word against my short, straight hair, and my large straw hat, if you only knew what *I* know about beautiful curls. I see what Sophia’s cost her. Oh dear, oh dear, Naldo! it would drive me mad to do what she does to the outside of that pretty head of hers every night and morning.” And Margaret went through a pantomimic performance of brushing and curling before an imaginary looking-glass, which she consulted with solemn intensity, advancing a little and retreating a little, to try the effect of this or that position of a curl. This imitation of Sophia was so truthful and so funny, that Naldo laughed heartily. At length, when they had both laughed enough, Naldo said, “But still, Meg, don’t you think Sophia’s hair is so very, very pretty, that it is worth a little trouble to make the best of it?”

“Yes, dear, I do; because it really is no trouble to her. She likes it. Perhaps if I had dark auburn hair like hers I might do as she does, instead of laughing at her. Only I don’t think I could go to bed with that forest of knotty curl-papers all over my head. I would rather go to bed with a head like Bottom the Weaver. But don’t tell Sophy that: I should get well scolded for my unlady-like taste. Heigh-ho! I shall never do for a fine lady!”



"Never mind, Meg; you will do very well to live in the wood with me. But—here comes William Grey with my chaise. It will be pleasant on the hay under the walnut-tree. I can sit there and watch you all; and when you are tired you can come and sit beside me and read something aloud. I love to hear you read. You have such a dear, nice voice; and I understand what you read as well as when I read myself. Let's have Bottom the Weaver, to-day. It's such fun! And now I shall be sure to think of you with his head."

They had been talking in the study, near the open window which faced the lawn. Margaret sat in the arm-chair which their father used to occupy in lesson time; and little Reginald, though he was nearly eleven years old, sat in her lap. They always sat thus when they were alone, and Reginald found his heart soften and his tongue loosen when he felt his sister's arms clasping him, and he could lay his head on her shoulder. Margaret had a *caressante* manner towards him, and he loved to be caressed. It was an assurance that he was not too much unlike other people to be loved. When others were present Margaret never took Reginald on her lap, but sat beside him on the sofa. It made his infirmity more conspicuous, she thought, to be nursed like a baby; she dreaded, even more than he did, the observations that careless spectators might make about his peculiarities. She was most anxious to preserve what might be called the dignity of his affliction. She always kept a shawl in readiness to throw over his lower limbs when he lay on the sofa in the drawing-room, and propped him up so well with cushions, that you would not have known he was different from other boys, except for the peculiar expression which is always to be seen in the face of a deformed person. Had you seen Reginald enthroned thus, amusing himself with his violin, his arms and hands showing considerable vigour, you would not have suspected the extent of his infirmity. Margaret and Reginald were the only two of my grandfather's family who had any great natural taste for music; this was, of course, another strong bond of union between them. The

strength of that bond can only be estimated by two or more persons who love and practise music in the midst of an unmusical family. While they were sitting thus, Reginald's garden-chair, drawn by a Newfoundland dog of gigantic dimensions, and conducted by a boy about fourteen years old, of dimensions to match the dog, stopped before the window.

"Good morning, Cæsar! Good morning, Brutus!" cried Margaret.

"Bow-wow," barked the dog, in the deepest of canine accents.

"How d'ye do?" growled the boy, in the most inarticulate of boyish voices. Both dog and boy looked very pleased to be noticed. Which was Cæsar and which was Brutus it was not easy to tell.

The boy was William Grey, a pupil of my grandfather's; the second son of the lady and gentleman of that name who were present at Margaret's christening. He was what his parents called a remarkably fine-grown lad, i.e. he was a great, overgrown behemoth of a boy. He was what they called *rather slow*, but what everybody else called profoundly stupid, except, indeed, Margaret Hastings, who always said "Brutus was not half so stupid as he seemed." It was she who gave him that nickname, partly on that very account, and partly because of a certain passage in Aurelius Victor.

Poor William Grey! with a singular incapacity for verbal acquirement, being unable to speak or to read his mother tongue with anything like correctness or fluency at the age of eleven, he was sent by his father to Mr. Hastings "*to learn Latin and all other things proper for a gentleman.*"

"We have not pushed him at all, you will find; but he really must be doing something in the classics soon, as we intend him for the Church. Get him as forward as you can, my dear sir!" said the father.

Mr. Hastings found, not only that he had not been *pushed*, but that no power of pedagogy could ever push him very far. Nature had put her veto on the measure. She said plainly enough, "Books are not the tools this creature requires."

But his pastors and masters, and society at large, recognised only one form of education ; and the boy of bone and muscle, who would have been happy felling trees in the backwoods, breaking in horses, reaping, ploughing, thrashing, building houses, or quarrying stone, was set down to learn mathematics, Latin, and Greek, for five or six hours a day. He was so very dull, that if he had not been a well-disposed boy, Mr. Hastings would have sent him home to his father as incapable. To my aunt's credit, be it told, though she was a clever, lively girl, and William Grey's blunders were very funny, she never laughed at him half as much as the others did. She saw that he really took great pains to learn. When she heard her father talk about sending him home, she felt for the poor boy very much. That same evening, when William Grey was poring over his lesson in the study, long after the others had done theirs, and were gone out to play, Margaret sat down beside him, made him take his two huge hands from his two huge ears, moved his elbows from the table, and announced that it was her intention to help him with his lesson. William Grey sighed heavily, and said that he never should be able to learn it.

"Nonsense!" said Margaret, laughing. "You a boy, and let anything conquer you!"

"But I am so stupid."

"Oh, you are clever enough sometimes! Look at that beautiful garden-chair you have made for Naldo! None of our boys could do that."

"No, I know that," said the dunce, rubbing his forehead with pleasure, and kicking out his long legs. "None of you! —but Lord Merle or Arundel could make a better one. You see, Miss Margaret, I never can learn anything out of a book. As soon as I see anything in print, it seems to set my senses all sixes and sevens."

"Let me see what your lesson is about," said Margaret, good-naturedly. "Aurelius Victor, of course! You've been in this book a shameful time. However, if you will let me help you, you shall get out of it in two months."

"Let you help me!" exclaimed the poor boy. "Oh, Maggie, I can't tell you how much obliged I should be! My father is so kind to me, and he has set his heart on my getting on with my studies. He will be so disappointed when he finds I am too stupid to learn what other boys learn." And he sighed heavily. "You are all so clever! It quite puts me out, when I *do* know a lesson, to think how much better even that little Reginald knows it than I ever could. I get quite down-hearted when I see how clever you are, every one of you, and how very dull and stupid I am."

"Come, come!" said Maggie, encouragingly. "You are not nearly so stupid as you think. If you were very stupid, you would not be sensible enough to know that you were not quite so quick as we others are. Papa said one day, that while your body was growing so fast your mind could not be very active, and that he thought in a year or two you would come out bright."

"Did he say so, eh?" asked the great boy, making more plunges with his legs.

"He did; but don't kick me for it. I declare, I might just as well go and sit in Donald's stall as come and sit by you. Now, tell me," said she, taking up the dog's-eared dirty book, "what is your lesson about? Do you know?"

"Oh, yes! I know what it is about. It's about a fellow named Brutus. You know he was afraid of being killed by another fellow, who was the king, and so he made believe he was a fool. He knew the king wouldn't think it worth while to kill him, unless he was clever enough to invent mischief. And then he went and lived among the king's children, and was brought up with them, and pretended he was very stupid, while all the time he was a great deal cleverer than they were. That's why they called him Brutus."

"Oh, oh!" said Maggie. "You know all that, do you? *That's* the trick you're playing us, I fancy! You see you are not the first person who has passed himself off for stupid when he was not. Come, Brutus! It won't do to sham stupid with *me*, now," she said, with a provoking smile and

grimace. "You know the meaning of your lesson, so now come and read it, and construe it properly. Head up, Brutus! Begin!"

William Grey burst out laughing, as her simple jest penetrated slowly into the dark recesses of his mind. "That's a good'un! I wish, by Jove, it was true!"

"Don't talk about Jove!" exclaimed Margaret. "The other Brutus pretended to know nothing about him. Now, leave off laughing!" she added, pursing up her mouth and pointing with her finger to the first sentence of the lesson. "You know the meaning of it, so surely it can't be difficult."

"You're out *there*, Miss Maggie, clever as you are. I understand the meaning, but I'll be shot if I can understand the *words*, and the way they come in Latin—the cart before the horse—and *always* the first word last. And, then, those horrible declensions and irregular verbs!"

Margaret tapped with her finger on the book. "Talking won't learn a lesson, Brutus. Begin!"

He began; and his companion helped him over his difficulties so cheerfully—making fun of the genitive and dative cases and pluperfect tenses in such a surprising way,—that by the time his task was accomplished a new light shone in on his mind.

"Thank you, Maggie. I don't wonder, *now*, that you are so fond of your lessons. You turn them all into play."

"No, I don't, Brutus. It used to be no play to prepare six or seven pages of Cæsar every day. But you shall judge for yourself before long; for as sure as I mean to call you Brutus, and tell no one *why*, so sure shall you be pushed into 'De Bello Gallico' in less than two months. So, now, make up your mind to have me come every day and see that you learn your lesson."

"Dear Maggie! you are very good-natured. I always thought you laughed at me."

"So I do. Who could help it?" laughed Maggie. "If you could see what antics you play with your great arms and legs, you would laugh too."

"Oh, but I mean laugh at me because I am so stupid."

Maggie left off laughing, and stroked the rough hair of the great dunce, and looked kindly in his face, and told him that she should think it a very ill-natured thing to laugh at any boy because he was not clever. "You know, Brutus—(you won't mind my calling you *that*, will you?—it's such a *nice* name for you, you know)"—and her brown eyes glanced into his with a mirthful expression.

"Mind it? Lord bless you, I like it!" And the great boy became red with excitement and pleasure, and fidgeted about fearfully with his legs, and longed very much to hug Maggie in his arms, and tell her that she was the kindest, cleverest, best little girl in the world, and that he loved her almost as well as Carlotta, his favourite sister.

"Well, then—you know, Brutus, we are not all born alike. It's not your fault if you are not quick at books, and it's not my fault if I can't understand that machine you are making. It's very silly of you to fancy that everybody is cleverer than you are. Arundel likes you very much; he says you have a great talent for mechanics."

"Does he like me, though?" asked the boy, starting up in delight. "I'm so glad, for I like him better than anybody almost. I don't know what it is about him that makes me think so much of him. He knows all the things that you all know,—you Hastingses."

"Oh, a great deal more than any of us," said Maggie, "except Henry and James, and they are so much older."

"And then he can do all sorts of things that I can do, and a great many more that I can't. And he invents such clever improvements. And he's not a bit proud and conceited, like Lord Merle. He never seems as if he knew that he was so much better than everybody. He goes for walks with me, you know, and I show him the foxes' holes and the badgers', and we have fine fun together. Clever as he is about books, he don't despise me because I'm a stupid fellow; that makes me like him." And William Grey became quite enthusiastic. "Now, Maggie, if I could only believe that you would care

for me, and Arundel Raby would care for me, I should set to work, tooth and nail; and—by Jove! I'd see who'd be master, me or my stupid brains."

"Bravo, Brutus!" exclaimed Maggie, patting him on the head encouragingly. Then, understand that you and I and Arundel are friends. I really *do* like you, William; and so does he. May I tell him all about this? You shall see! He will offer himself to you for a friend, just as I do. We shan't care for you, you know, *quite* as much as we do for each other. We have been great friends ever since we were babies, and mean to be so all our lives."

"Of course not!" interrupted William. "You two clever fellows *couldn't* care for me as much as you do for each other. If you will only care for me half as much, I shall be quite contented. You're laughing because I called you a *fellow*. But I forgot that you were not a boy. I'm sure *that* was stupid, for you are a great deal kinder and gentler than any boy." And his heavy face was lighted up by grateful intelligence.

"Not kinder and gentler than Arundel," added Maggie, by way of qualification.

Thus the good-natured, clever girl, bound the good-natured, stupid boy to her. Stupid as he was, he was intelligent enough to devise acceptable ways of showing his gratitude. He bore with Reginald's ill-concealed contempt for his awkwardness, ugliness, and stupidity, and carried him about for Maggie—made all sorts of seats and contrivances for making him comfortable. When the joyful day came (within the promised time, too) that William Grey first read aloud to Mr. Hastings in Latin the antique fact that "all Gaul is divided into three parts,"—the master was so delighted, that he sent home his pupil for a holiday, that his parents might be delighted too. And delighted enough they were. Mr. Grey gave his son ten pounds on the spot. As soon as he had possession of this money, William Grey, without saying a word to any one, walked off to Carleton Park, up through the Long Wood, to Green the keeper's house. There, by means of half a guinea for his trouble, he induced that worthy to set

off with him directly in his taxed cart to P——. The object of this impromptu visit to the town was to purchase a certain very large Newfoundland dog, which William Grey thought (for he was shrewd enough in some things) that Green would be able to purchase for five guineas, but which he, a gentleman's son, would not be able to get for less than twenty. The event was as he expected, and they drove home in the taxed cart with the great dog snugly ensconced between them.

The next day, when William Grey returned to Carleton Rectory, the great dog went with him, and was presented to Reginald as a fit animal to draw the garden-chair, which the giver had made. Reginald was delighted beyond measure. Dogs were the animals he loved best next to girls, he said; and there never was in all the world such a magnificent dog as this.

"What name shall we give it, Maggie?" cried out the child, as William Grey made the dog run and jump on the lawn, before them.

"Suppose we call him *Cæsar*," said Maggie. Come here, Brutus! What do you say to our calling that *other* great dog *Cæsar*, in memory of yesterday?"

"I say, yes!" laughed William Grey.

\* \* \* \* \*

These antecedents having been detailed, the reader will be able to comprehend the state of matters under the walnut-tree, where Reginald and Maggie, Brutus and *Cæsar*, were to be seen at noon, a little apart from the group already described, and yet so disposed that a person coming from the house could see them both together. Reginald reclined on cushions in the little chaise. His violin-case lay across the front, so as to serve for a table, on which rested a sketch-book. He was drawing very fast with a blacklead pencil. Margaret, attired in a plain nankeen frock and trousers, with a white tippet and sleeves, and a broad straw hat, sat on the hay, which Brutus had heaped up so high that it raised her to a level with Naldo in his chaise. She was reading part of the "*Midsummer Night's Dream*" aloud. Brutus and *Cæsar* both lay at her



feet. Cæsar slept, curled up in a heap. Brutus was wide awake, though he looked the very reverse. He was curled up in a heap, too, with his head propped upon Cæsar. If a penance-deviser of the Inquisition had ordered him to assume that attitude for an hour, he would have called it very cruel ; but when Maggie suggested to him that he "must be miserable lying like that," he declared that, "By Jove," he "never was more comfortable." "Go on, about the moonshine and the wall, and all that rubbish. I wonder what you can both see in it to laugh at!"

"There is not a more fearful wild-fowl than your lion living."

He muttered to himself after a minute or two: "That is down right nonsense, Maggie! It must be a misprint! Why, Reginald, it ought to be wild *beast*, not *fowl*, you know, of course."

To poor Brutus's complete discomfiture, his emendation of Shakspeare was received with a peal of laughter from Maggie, in which Reginald joined heartily. Mrs. Hastings, whose ear was always open to the lightest sound of pleasure or pain from Reginald, and who had placed herself so that she could see him when she turned her head, was moved to tender mirth herself when she saw Reginald in a complete paroxysm of laughter, drumming with both fists on the violin-case in his ecstasy. What would she have given to be able to make him laugh so heartily!

"What *are* you laughing at?" growled Brutus, looking at Maggie, and getting somewhat nettled.

"Oh, don't, don't—pray don't!" gasped Maggie, faint with laughter.

"What joke is Grey up to now?" asked Tom, flinging himself round. "Let's hear his last good thing."

"See, papa! see!" said Maggie, stopping her merriment. "There is Henry coming across the field. He has got some news. He is holding up something—letters or newspapers."

Every one became still, and watched the progress of Henry Hastings. He was running fast.

"I hope nothing has happened to prevent James's return to-day," said Mrs. Hastings to her husband.

"He would not flourish a newspaper in that way, mamma, if that were the case," said Sophia. "Perhaps Lord Merle and his brother are come."

"That wouldn't be in a newspaper, Sophy," said Tom. "What do you think it is, papa?" he inquired, seeing his father rise eagerly.

"What news, my boy?" shouted Mr. Hastings, making a trumpet of his two hands.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted Henry, in reply.

"Maggie, Maggie! Do you think Bonaparte has won another battle?" whispered Naldo, eagerly.

Brutus heard the whisper, and replied sensibly enough—"He wouldn't be shouting 'hurrah!' like that for Bonaparte."

On came Henry—a tall, active youth of twenty—flourishing above his head the letters and newspapers he had brought from the castle. "Hurrah! hurrah! News! news!" he cried, flinging himself on the hay among them. "Father, you are right! That fool Lord—— is out, and Lord Carleton is in his place! The papers are all full of it! Such a commotion! There's a note for you from her ladyship. She is going to London to-morrow morning. There's news for you, too, girls and boys—for of course Lord Merle and Arundel won't come here this vacation."

"Oh! Oh-o-o-o!" groaned the young folks.

"But James is coming here to-day, my dears," said Mrs. Hastings, by way of consolation.

"Any more news, Henry?" asked Sophia.

"Not actual news;—only there's a full, true, and particular account of the great battle of Wagram, near Vienna, which happened on the sixth of this month. I do not know how many were killed and wounded, but it seems to have been a terrible slaughter—a very hard-fought affair. There's some talk, too, mother, that that low brute Bonaparte is going to divorce his wife, and marry one of the Austrian archduchesses."

"That must be the talk of his enemies, my dear. 'La

*grande nation*' would never bear such an act as that. What would Murat say, with his *honneur et les dames*?"

"We shall see," said Henry. "It's my opinion that if Bonaparte told them it was for the honour and glory of *la grande nation* to throw their wives into the Bay of Biscay, every Frenchman would be ready to contribute *Madame* to the general immersion. Politeness and consideration for women!—Fudge! That's all very well for evening parties in Paris. But let a woman take care how she trusts to a Frenchman's *honour* when it's to his interest to be dishonourable."

"Hey-day! National antipathy breaking out as usual, Henry!" exclaimed his father, laughing. "Take care your sisters don't marry Frenchmen."

"What a dreadful idea!" exclaimed Sophia.

"There's Lady Carleton's note, my dear," said Mr. Hastings, handing it to his wife. "I must go and read this important news. Henry, my boy, I leave you to superintend the field. Make them work well, and the hay will be all in to-night." Thus saying, the Rector gathered up letters and papers, and walked across the field to the house. The children went on talking and preparing themselves to renew their pleasant labours, while Mrs. Hastings read the following note:—

"DEAR MR. HASTINGS,—At last our party is triumphant, as I prophesied to Frederick two months since it must be, for the very sufficient reason that '*dans le pays des aveugles les borgnes sont rois.*' You will laugh at my ineffectual efforts to conceal my pride in my husband—my conviction that there is not a man in the country fitter to overcome the present difficulties. It's perfectly ridiculous to talk of C—, or Lord L—, or the Duke of —, at such a crisis. They tried to form a ministry without Frederick—it was utter blindness; but they did, and failed. They have learned one good thing by the failure—they never knew before what they could *not* do. It's hard if Frederick and the Duke of Alderney can't do something with the House. They are sure of a majority upon almost every point they want to carry. I am sorry that the

Doctors sent me down here this month. I have lost the pleasure of being with Frederick during these last three days. Poor fellow, he has had a dreadfully fatiguing time of it—four times to Windsor in three days!—and our house like all the government offices fused into one. He says it is a very good thing I was not in town, for I should not even have had time to remonstrate with, or congratulate, him;—that eating, drinking, and sleeping are the vulgar relaxations of ordinary men, but that a new cabinet minister has no leisure for such things. I go up to London to-morrow, of course. He is anxiously expecting my arrival and that of the boys. They were to have come down here for the vacation, and Frederick himself was to have come with them; but *le roi a changé tout cela*. Now, I go to London, and we all remain there or go to the sea-side; just as it will suit Frederick best. I am sorry for this on many accounts. The boys, too, will be sorry not to spend their holidays with your children. But ‘what is to be done when one’s father becomes a Minister of State?’ as Arundel says, anticipating the event. That boy always sees further than any of us. I am rather anxious about him now. He has worked rather too hard, I fear. François says that hard work is as congenial to him as ‘*l’eau aux poissons*,’ and that no contrivances will keep him from it. He is now in the fifth form—and is looked upon as a prodigy. Frank gets on well too, but he is only in the Remove. He is not at all jealous of Arundel. He seems to look upon it as a settled thing that Arundel should be his superior at school, and ‘sees no fun in trying whether a Shetland pony can run as fast as a thorough-bred racer.’ ‘Perhaps I play first fiddle out of the classes,’ he adds. I dare say he does. They are both good boys. Give my love to Mrs. Hastings, and tell her that, as it is Miss Price’s birthday, we want Naldo to come when Margaret comes for her lesson this afternoon. She must let them take tea in state with us. Ask Naldo to bring his violin, and tell him I have got a letter from a friend in Vienna, containing an account of poor Haydn’s death, which I will read to him.

“Yours ever truly, C. C.”

When Mrs. Hastings asked Naldo if he would like to go, he looked much pleased, and said that he should.

"Shall I have time to practise some of those Mozart things, Maggie, before we go?" he asked.

"Oh yes, lots of time," said Maggie. "You can practise now, dear; for we are all going to work again. There comes the cart. Papa said the hay must be finished to-night. If I go out to tea I must do double work now. Where's my fork, Brutus, you 'fearful wild-fowl'?"

Naldo laughed; Brutus looked cross, but got the fork.

"I say, Maggie, a pretty sort of a sister you are, to be going out to tea the day James is coming home!" said Tom, who loved to tease.

"Very wise you are!" said Brutus. "The London coach don't get to P—— till after eight, and James couldn't be here till after nine; and you know they will be back from the castle by that time for Naldo to go to bed."

"I say, Maggie," whispered Naldo, "I do so want to hear all about that battle! Do you think papa would let you read me the account out of the newspaper?—I can't practise a note till I hear it."

Maggie spoke to her mamma aside, who said she would stay and read the account of the battle to Naldo while his sister went to amuse herself with the others. Reginald would rather have had Maggie; but he was much obliged to his mamma for reading to him. When she had finished, she kissed him and went away, leaving him busied with his violin. He did not practise at all, but played strange snatches of extemporary music—imitating the booming of great cannon—the gallop of horses—the clash of swords—the confused uproar of a battle-field—and the low moans of the dying. These strange, wild, discordant sounds so wrought on the nervous system of poor Cæsar, that after grunting and shaking himself, and casting imploring looks at the juvenile musician, he set up a desperate howl, which made Naldo lay down the instrument, and try to coax him into good humour. While thus employed, Maggie came up to ask "what was the matter?"

"Oh, nothing! only I was trying to make out the battle of Wagram, and Cæsar didn't like it."

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## CHAPTER II.

AN EVENING AT THE CASTLE—WITH NO REFERENCE TO MADAME DE GENLIS.

—"A soft and solemn-breathed sound  
Rose like a stream of rich distilled perfumes,  
And stole upon the air."

*Comus.*

"As though a rose should shut and be a bud again."

*St. Agnes' Eve.*

It was evening. Lady Carleton's beautiful private room wore a festal air. The windows were thrown open, and the silken curtains were looped back to admit the glow of sunset and the gently rising breeze. The light and the breeze passed through a bowery screen of exotics arranged in the embrasure of each window; and as they passed they performed what, to little Naldo, seemed like a work of enchantment,—gilding the pale blossoms of the oleander and the Provence rose; firing the rich masses of the cactus flower with an intenser crimson; waving the fans of the mimosa, and the delicate wreaths of starry-blossomed creepers whose names he knew not, and which were the more beautiful and wonderful to him on that account. Soft perfumes from the rose, the acacia, and the heliotrope, shaken out at every gentle motion of the wind, wandered dreamily into the apartment, mingling with other odours from fresh fruits half hidden in leaves, that were heaped up

"On golden dishes and in baskets bright  
Of wreathed silver."

Miss Price had also caused the housekeeper to bring forth from her closet

—"a heap  
Of candied-apple, quince, and plum, and gourd,  
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,

---

And lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon,  
Manna and dates, in argosy transferred  
From Fez ; and spiced dainties every one  
From silken Samarcand to cedared Lebanon."

The news of this change of ministry ; the fulfilment of her husband's ambitious hopes ; the brilliant success of Arundel at Eton ; the return of both boys in perfect health ; the anticipated pleasure of embracing them, and of witnessing the triumph of her husband on the morrow (for on the evening of the next day she was to be in London), had given colour to Lady Carleton's cheek and gaiety to her manner. Miss Price's affectionate eye discerned somewhat of the old vivacity in her former pupil. Graceful and elegant she always was ; and this evening she wore, in honour of the birthday, a rich dress of silver-grey satin, which so bewitched little Maggie by its beauty, that she caught herself feeling the folds of it secretly, as she sat beside the wearer, and wondered whether any one ever wore so delicate and soft a dress before. The presence of Maggie and Naldo had also conspired, for the moment, to restore Lady Carleton's natural good spirits and graceful *insouciance*. She was fond of the children, especially of her god-daughter ;—in whose opening character she thought she discerned many rare and noble qualities, and whose enthusiastic affection and reverence for herself she could not but perceive. The affection between Maggie and the countess was strong and genuine. I believe it caused a slight feeling of jealousy in my grandmother's mind ; for Maggie would confide many things to Lady Carleton which she shrank from telling her more dignified and less sympathising mother, although her love for her was profound. Maggie never could account for this to her own satisfaction. " I can say things to you, dear Lady Carleton, which I cannot say to mamma. I'm afraid of her sometimes. I am never afraid of you ? "

As Naldo lay on the soft couch near the window, his eyes roamed in ecstasy from the sunlit-sky and the bright flowers to the table of white marble on which the dainties already mentioned were displayed. They were so pretty to look at !

Beyond that *he* cared not for them; he was a sickly child, and instead of enjoying food, it was as much as he could do to eat enough to sustain his weakly frame. The rich colouring in the room afforded him a real treat. The roseate walls, the gilded picture-frames, the pictures themselves, and the furniture of ormolu and marqueterie, all lighted up by the glorious sunset, blended in his imagination with the delicious perfumes and the more delicious music. For Lady Carleton, having given Maggie her lesson, and heard Naldo play on his violin, had kindly complied with the children's request, and was singing for their especial gratification "Angels ever bright and fair." While Lady Carleton is finishing her "soft and solemn-breathed" song, I will give a slight sketch of Maggie, as she appears in a family picture painted about this time, and in which she is represented attired as she was on this evening. The costume is somewhat more elegant than that of the hay-field and the school-room, although not at all elaborate. It consists of a plain white muslin frock, with a short and full bodice, cut low in the neck, so as to exhibit a pair of pretty rounded shoulders. The sleeves, also, according to the fashion of the time, are very short, and made still shorter by being tied up with narrow blue ribbon of the colour of the sash, much in the style of baby-frocks of the present day. As Maggie's arms, even at that age, were remarkably well-shaped, the very short sleeves are not at all unbecoming, although her sister Sophia reproached her severely when the picture was painted for "allowing them to get so brown that they were not fit to be seen." The artist has given their sunburnt hue and beautiful form with equal accuracy. The head and face are striking, but not pretty. The face is round and ruddy, the mouth rather large, but sensitive and generous—upon the whole, a promising mouth; the nose neither too large nor too small, not very distinctly cut as yet, but with an irretrievable tendency to point upwards. Taken in conjunction with the corners of the mouth, you would say the owner of such a nose must have a comic turn of mind. The eyes are decidedly fine, being large, and well set beneath the brows, of a rich hazel



brown, uniting fire and softness, tender melancholy and a piquant playfulness. They are fringed with long dark lashes, and curtained by the whitest lids. Above them are straight brows of a dark colour, delicately traced along the edge of the low, broad forehead; which, thanks to the protection of the garden hat, seems never to have been tanned, and is of a pure white, "without freckle or spot." Contrasting strangely with the dark colour of the eyes and eyebrows, parted in the middle, and disposed on each side of the candid brow, are wavy masses of short, flaxen-gold hair. This union of fair hair and dark eyes gives an uncommon look to the face. Some painters have adopted it in their heads of cherubim and juvenile saints; and it seems to me that they have succeeded admirably in conveying an idea of mingled innocence and ardour—spiritual purity and intense human passion. At all events, any physiognomist would attribute these mental characteristics to Margaret Hastings, as she appears at thirteen.

When the song was finished, no one said "thank you." They were all too full of happiness—the happiness which sweet music brings to the heart; a happiness which expresses itself in a low-breathed sigh, followed by an unconscious smile. Margaret looked lovely for a moment. Lady Carleton caught the expression, and was surprised; she had always regretted that her god-daughter was so odd-looking.

"My dear," said Miss Price, "I think we must send home our visitors about the time their brother will be coming from P——."

Reginald uttered a dissentient, "Oh!"

"You don't want to go, Naldo?" said Lady Carleton, rising from the instrument, and approaching him. "But it is not nearly the time yet."

"No," said the child, in his clear, melancholy voice. "I like to be here. It is so much nicer here than at home! Everything is so beautiful. Even the sunset and the flowers;" and he pointed to the window. "I should like to be here always; would not you, Maggie?"

"If you were always here, it would be no treat, my love,"

said Miss Price. "A favourite author of your papa's says, 'He that feasts every day, feasts no day.'"

"While you dilate on that very important theme to Naldo, I will fulfil my promise to Maggie, before it grows darker. She and I are going to have a peep at those rooms on the south terrace, which have been shut up so long."

"Had you not better defer seeing them till another occasion?" said Miss Price. "It will take you some time to look at them."

"Another time?—I am going to London to-morrow. Besides, Maggie and I have a special purpose in seeing them to-night—before I go."

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE UNINHABITED ROOMS.

"The chambers carved so curiously—  
Carved with figures strange and sweet,  
All made out of the carver's brain."

*Christabel.*

LADY CARLETON took Maggie with her down to the great hall. The door was open, and as the evening was very warm they stepped into the court without any additional garment.

"Come, Margaret, my dear," she said, leading the way towards the south front of the castle. "I think I can find the person I want without help. There he is," she continued, as they turned an angle, and stood on the handsome but neglected terrace which ran along that side of the castle, and from which, by flights of broad steps—one in the middle and one at each end—you descended into an old-fashioned Italian garden. On the top step of the middle flight, with his back resting against one of the stone griffins that presided over the balustrade, sat an old man smoking a pipe. His back was towards them as they approached.

"Does Cuthbert keep the keys of the old rooms?" asked Maggie. "I thought Mrs. Fenton had them."

"No. Mrs. Fenton is as superstitious as the inferior servants, who all believe that the terrace-rooms are haunted. Fearing that some one might play tricks and frighten them, I gave the keys to old Cuthbert, who is a sort of *esprit fort*. Ah!" continued the countess, looking with the eye of a mistress at the building, "I wish I could have obliged Miss Price, and made her the housekeeper of Carleton."

"A lady, like Miss Price!" exclaimed Maggie, half indignantly.

"My dear child, I would not degrade Miss Price—I would raise the office of housekeeper. In a noble castle like this, an ignorant person should not preside during the owner's absence. If Mrs. Fenton had been a woman of education and taste, she would be my deputy, not a mere machine which requires constant attention. However, Mrs. Fenton is an excellent dame, and a very good housekeeper of the old school. But I shall never place any but a gentlewoman here again."

"What queer things they say of Cuthbert," began Maggie, as she jumped along the terrace beside the slow-moving lady of the castle.

"Hush!" said the latter, with a smile. "He will hear you. Good evening, Mr. Fenton." Lady Carleton had the aristocratic habit of giving an inferior his full style and title. Every one else at Carleton called the superannuated head-gardener "Old Cuthbert"—much to the annoyance of his wife, who was always known as "Mrs. Fenton;" though her husband presumed upon his connection, and called her "Betty."

"Good evening, Mr. Fenton."

The old man started, as if awaked from a dream, and turned his dazzled eyes from the sun to the speaker, who had reached him unperceived. In a moment he rose, laid aside his pipe, and taking off his cloth cap, said, with a respectful bow, "Good evening, my lady; good evening, miss."

"Mr. Fenton, I want to look at those rooms directly;" pointing to the windows.

"Certainly, if your ladyship wishes to see them to-night. Otherwise, I would have them opened and swept and dusted in the morning. You will find them very dirty, my lady."

"I suppose so; but I do not mind that. I do not wish to examine them very minutely. I merely want to see what they are like."

"Very good, my lady. I will get the keys. Perhaps you and Miss Maggie would like to remain here while I go round and open some of the windows. You can step into the rooms from here, without the trouble of going round into the house again. You had better, my lady; for as sure as my name's Cuthbert, you'll be half suffocated with the dust and damp of the shut-up corridor and the auld rooms. They have not been opened since—I do not know when."

"Yes, Mr. Fenton. I think your advice is very good. We will remain here till you open some of those windows. Be as quick as you can, if you please."

The old man bowed, and walked off much faster than Maggie had ever seen him walk.

"Well, Maggie, so they tell queer tales of old Cuthbert, do they? That is something new to me. You used to say that he told queer tales himself. What queer tales have you heard of him, and who are *they*? Do you understand the meaning of, '*les on dits ne sont jamais vrais*'?"

Margaret's large eyes glanced up affectionately at the pale, beautiful face that bent over her.

"Dear Lady Carleton! I have not been gossiping with the servants or the villagers. Indeed I have not. But I could not help hearing what Miss Price and mamma and papa were saying one day, when I was in the room, about old Cuthbert. He has strange dreams, and can foretell future events, and knows a great many secrets of the earl's family and the castle."

Lady Carleton kissed her god-daughter's fair forehead, and smiled at her excitement.

"That Cuthbert has strange dreams, I can believe, for he smokes a great deal of tobacco, and eats opium; and that he

knows more than most of our people about the Raby family, I can believe too, for he is nearly seventy years old, and came here from North Ashurst before he was fifteen, and was afterwards a confidential servant of the late earl; but that he has any extraordinary power in predicting future events, I cannot believe. You must have been mistaken in thinking that your papa and mamma and Miss Price believed *that* either, although they may have repeated some of the absurd reports on the subject which the uneducated believe. You are too prone to credit the marvellous stories you hear, my darling. Perhaps you believe that the old countess, as they call her, walks along this terrace by night, clad in boy's clothes—as she is reported to have tried to escape from her cruel husband in that disguise?"

"Yes," said Maggie; "and they say that she might have got away very easily, but that she waited for her baby, that the nurse was to give her through one of those very windows. They say she waited and waited, and walked up and down this terrace from sunset almost to sunrise, stopping at the windows, and trying to peep in to see if the nurse was coming. She was dreadfully afraid lest her husband, the *wicked lord*, should find out that she had got out of the castle. At last she knocked gently at a window—one of these—I don't know which one—and called, 'Betty! Betty!' very softly, thinking the nurse (who is Mrs. Fenton now) would hear her. The window was opened gently, and Mrs. Fenton's voice said to her, 'Stop a moment, my lady.' The poor countess tried to see her baby in the dim light, and looked in at the window, dressed as she was in boy's clothes; and just then there came a blaze of light, and she saw her husband's face grinning at her. So she flew away down these steps into the garden there, to hide herself among the bushes, in the dark, in hopes to escape into the park before it was light. But the wicked lord had out ever-so-many dogs and men, and hunted the poor countess—actually hunted her!—and caught her, and brought her back again; and after that, he treated her more cruelly than before. Don't you think *that* story is true?" asked the indignant girl, with tearful eyes.

"I am afraid it is substantially true, my dear," said Lady Carleton, sharing her emotion; "but I cannot believe that the spirit of the poor lady, in her strange disguise, haunts this terrace in the summer nights, as the Carleton villagers say she does."

"Oh," said Maggie, recovering herself a little, "I do not believe *that*, of course. Don't you think the last earl must have been mad? Nobody could do some of the things he did, who was in his right mind."

Lady Carleton leaned against the old stone griffin as if she was tired; but she did not reply. Her young companion went on:

"They say he once tried to strangle his son—dear Lord Carleton! Old Cuthbert says he never meant to do it. He only did it to torment his wife. He had tied her in a chair, and made her look while he did it. Don't you think that was almost as wicked as if he had really meant to murder him? I do so hate that wicked lord!" said Maggie, and her eyes flashed through her tears. "He ought to have been hanged—or *beheaded*, I suppose, as he was a nobleman. But hanging is too good for him."

"What, Maggie! would you hang him if he were mad?"

Margaret paused.

"No,—oh, no! But I would have him shut up so that he could do no harm to any one. I can't think how any lady could marry him. See there! old Cuthbert is opening a window! I wonder whether that is the one the old countess tapped at. He knows; for he was with the earl that night, and helped to catch her and bring her back. He was a great favourite with the wicked lord, and that's no credit to him."

"I am afraid we don't know enough of those bygone days to judge him fairly," said her ladyship, approaching the open window. "I do not think Cuthbert is a bad man."

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, my lady," said the object of her remark when he had forced up the sash. "But the locks are all gone rusty, and I had much ado to get the old keys to turn in them. Wait a bit, Miss Margaret, and

"I'll just pull away some of these climbing plants, and then ye can step into the room."

He did so, and Lady Carleton entered the apartment. It was long and somewhat narrow. Besides the window by which they had entered, there were five other windows all looking on the terrace. The walls were hung with tapestry; but there were many blank spaces showing where large pictures had been. The floor was of oak, which had once been polished; and the ceiling of the same material was vaulted and tastefully carved, though not very elaborately. At either end of the room was a yawning chimney, the mantel-pieces of which were of oak, boldly carved over with a huge escutcheon of the Raby family. It had no furniture except some uncouth chairs of black oak, with tapestry seats.

Lady Carleton glanced over the apartment rapidly. "What is this room?" she asked.

"The south dining-hall, my lady. These doors open into the corridor;" and he threw open one.

Lady Carleton, closely followed by Maggie, stepped into the corridor. It was broad, silent, gloomy; the light came through painted glass windows; Maggie counted eleven of them, but she could not see to count the whole length of that ample passage.

"Those windows look into the inner quadrangle, of course?"

"They do, my lady."

"Let us go back into that great room," said Maggie.

"This corridor is so long and gloomy."

"It's the same length, I fancy, as the one above, which you admire so much," said the countess, putting her arm round Maggie.

"But that leads to *your* apartments," said the young girl, "and this leads to all sorts of unknown and uninhabited rooms: It frightens me."

"What do you think of this long room for Arundel's theatre?" asked Lady Carleton.

"I do not think it will do very well. It's not cheerful. There must be more rooms. Where does that door lead?" asked Maggie. Old Cuthbert did not seem to hear.

"Where does that door lead?" repeated Lady Carleton.

"Only into another of the old rooms, my lady."

"I should like to see it."

"Very good, my lady;" and he began to fumble among a bunch of keys.

"Will they not want more than one room if they act a play?" said Maggie.

"Yes. I suppose they will want several. But the first thing for us to settle is whether there is one of the unused rooms that will do for a theatre," said Lady Carleton.

"Oh, I do so long to see a play acted! Did not Arundel write word that there was one of the rooms he thought would do?"

"Yes," replied the countess. "He says he remembers going into these rooms with his father, when he was a very little child; and that there was a great recess with a door in one room. That room he says he recollects perfectly, because his father remained in it for some time; and he thinks it would make a capital theatre. That's the room we are to look at most particularly."

"How long Cuthbert is!" exclaimed the impatient girl. "It's getting dusk; and we shan't be able to see the rooms well, at all. Do tell him to be quick. I'm sure I could find the key. May I?"

At that moment old Cuthbert threw open the door, with a jerk; and Maggie sprang forward. "Oh! it's all dark;" and she retreated to Lady Carleton's side again.

"What room is that, Mr. Fenton?"

"The marble saloon, my lady. We used to call it the vine-room, too; you'll see *why* when I've opened some of the shutters." And he disappeared within the dark room, on the threshold of which the countess and Margaret stood in silent expectation.

"Had you not better get a light, Mr. Fenton? You may stumble over something and hurt yourself."

"No, thank you, my lady. I know my way blindfold here," replied a voice in the darkness, which sounded so



unlike the old man's, in Maggie's ear, that she wound her arm round Lady Carleton's waist, and tried to say something to assure herself that this unwonted sensation was not fear.

She uttered a little laugh. "This is quite romantic. I wish Lord Merle and Arundel were here. They would like it."

"You don't quite like it, Maggie," said the countess, smiling. "You are pale. Would you like to go back and wait for me on the terrace?"

"Oh, no, no!" whispered Maggie. She felt as if she could not speak loud. "Don't send me away. I am not afraid. I never am afraid; only it feels strange, and I am rather cold." She shivered and laughed and clung closer to the countess. "There! he has got a shutter open. Oh, how very, very beautiful!"

The marble saloon must have looked somewhat like a fairy vision to eyes that had been straining themselves in mere darkness for some minutes, when a flood of many-coloured light was suddenly let in athwart its singular beauty. Each fold of the huge shutters, as it was removed from that lofty gothic window, revealed fresh beauties, and Lady Carleton stood in mute astonishment in the centre of the apartment. The window at first attracted attention. It was a very fine specimen of Italian painting. The picture in the centre was a copy of Titian's celebrated "Bacchus and Ariadne," and all the surrounding portions of glass represented Italian vintage scenes in medallions of various shapes and sizes, so arranged as to form a setting of gems to the central piece. The brilliant colouring was reflected on floor, walls, and ceiling; which were themselves as valuable works of art as the pictures that intercepted the common light of day.

"What a beautiful window!" whispered Maggie. "It is like — Cathedral."

"Can you open the window, Mr. Fenton?" said the countess. "The room wants airing; and I should like to look at this carving in clear daylight. The colours are confusing."

The window was easily opened, and, in the mellow evening light, Lady Carleton began to examine one of the finest rooms she had ever seen. It was all of marble, richly carved in every part, except the floor, and that was of the very finest mosaic work. The walls and ceiling were perfect marvels of the chisel. They seemed to be entirely overgrown with the thickest vines, trained over pillars and arches of variegated marble. The vines themselves—stems, leaves, heavy drooping clusters of dusky purple grapes—were all carved out of marble in basso, mezzo, and alto-relievo, according to the requirements of perspective. Verde Antico, Verde di Corsica, the beautiful Mona marble, and that found at Kolmerden, in Sweden, had all been used by the daring artist in executing his design, and with perfect success. There was a trellis-work of twisted vine branches spread over the ceiling, from which hung the most exquisite wreaths and festoons of the vine, they seemed to be actually waving in the air; here and there a heavy cluster of grapes had apparently dragged a bough from its place half-way down into the apartment, where it hung in autumnal luxuriance for ever. The more nearly the walls were examined the more admirable seemed the skill and fidelity of the artist. Lady Carleton's curiosity rose at every step she took. There was something here and there which seemed familiar to her. "Surely, the colour of those grapes is not natural to the marble; I never saw marble of that colour;" she said, half to herself.

"It is the natural colour, my lady. It is the Anglesea marble that is dark purple. It's all natural marble. There's not a stroke of paint about the whole carving—I'm sure of that, for I saw it all being done."

"You?—How long ago was it done?"

"About fifty years ago since it was all put up here. But the artist was ten years carving it. He was a real genius, my lady! He designed the room for my lord's mother."

"He was a genius indeed if he designed and executed these walls and that ceiling. What was his name?"

"He was a Frenchman. His name was *De Merville*. The

countess knew him in Rome before she married the earl. After she was married he came here, and was ten years planning and carving this room."

"A noble work! *De Merville!*—What became of him?" asked the countess, with increased curiosity.

Old Cuthbert glanced towards Margaret. She was at a distant part of the room, feeling the grapes and leaves on the wall, to make herself quite sure they were not real. He dropped his voice lower, and advancing a step, replied, "It is a sad story, my lady. The earl became jealous of the poor gentleman, and was determined to be revenged. My lady was as innocent as Miss Margaret yonder; but he kept her shut up in this room and the next for years and years, till she died of a broken heart. And he contrived to have M. de Merville shut up in a French dungeon—they call a *lettre de cachet*. They say he lost his senses there, when he heard of the bad things the earl did to his family. But, maybe, you know all about *that*; for the present lord got him set at liberty, and was very kind to his family."

"Yes. I have heard something about it," replied the countess, concealing her surprise. "Did M. De Merville design the tables, cabinets, and sofas here?" They were all in perfect keeping with the walls, and of extraordinary beauty.

"Yes, my lady. He designed them all. I am proud to say I helped him in some of the rougher work. I carved the twisted vine-roots for the pedestal of that table—and I carved all the leaves on the back of that chair. The poor countess used to come and watch him at work in his studio. She had little else to amuse her, poor lady!"

"Where was his studio?" inquired Lady Carleton, feeling a strange interest in this unexpected revelation concerning the old man, whose fondness for carving grapes in his dotage she had often laughed at.

"He used the next room, the oak parlour, as a studio. It was my lady's bedroom afterwards." The old man's face grew dark, as if a black cloud of memory had suddenly obscured it.

"Has the oak-parlour a large recess in it?" inquired the countess.

Old Cuthbert seemed to hear nothing.

The countess spoke louder. "You may open the door into the next room, now."

"To-night, my lady? You will not be able to see the carving. Excuse me, but your ladyship had better wait till the morning."

"No. I wish to look into it to-night. I think *that* is the room I am in search of. If it be, I will trouble you no more this evening, as you seem indisposed to go into the rooms after sunset. I thought, Mr. Fenton, you had no superstition!" she added, smiling.

"Ah! it's not that, my lady! I'm not a coward!" And he began fitting keys into the lock. "If you had seen the unhappiness that I have seen in these rooms, you would not be very fond of going into them—especially at dusk. And on this unlucky day of all days in the year!"

"Why not on this day?"

"It was on the — of — that the poor countess tried to escape from her husband. I'll never forget that night, if I live to be a hundred years old!"

"Oh, please don't talk of that now, Cuthbert!—It is such a dreadful story!" said Margaret. "Let me help you with the keys. There, that's it!" The key turned easily in the lock;—the door was thrown open, and my aunt's parlour was before them.

"You can come in, my lady. These shutters have holes in them, and so the room is not quite dark. I will let in more light in a moment; but it is too late to see the carving. It's all oak; and as poor old M. de Merville used to say, 'There's no better carving to be found in Holland or in Italy.' It would amuse you for hours, Miss Margaret, to come and make out the odd things there are here. Serpents with wings—mermaids—cherubs—lions with men's heads—monkeys—flowers, with little naked boys asleep in them—dolphins, with flying cupids riding them like mad—grinning faces of devils,

and sweet young angel faces, and many things more than I can say."

"There's *the recess*!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Ah! yes. That recess was my lady's oratory!"—said old Cuthbert, speaking quickly. "She was a Catholic, you know. That used to be fitted up like a small chapel, with a beautiful altar, and a gold crucifix, and flowers, and wax tapers. Perhaps I had better go and fetch some lights, my lady."

"I think you had.—Stay!—Is that the reflection from a painted window in the oratory?"

"Yes, my lady. If you will just step into it you will see. It is a beautiful round window. I will go and fetch lights."

He retired, and Lady Carleton seated herself on one of the high-backed chairs to rest while she looked round the room. Maggie stood beside her; and as her young eyes pierced the gathering gloom and spied out all sorts of grotesque and beautiful devices on the walls and ceiling, she little thought of the days in store for her. She little thought that this room, into which she had come as if by accident, that evening, was to be the scene of nearly all the great events of her life. She had no prevision of the days—the years—that were to be spent by her in the solitude of the oak-parlour. Her young spirit had, before this, glanced, eager-eyed, into the future, but could not penetrate the golden mists of hope that curtained all. Ah! could she have seen the multitudinous hours thronging the space in that empty room—waiting each its time to bring her joy or pain, she would not have seen anything else there! People of sensitive and imaginative constitutions often have a presentiment that this or that person or place, seen for the first time, will strongly affect their future lives for good or ill; nor is this difficult to account for. It seems far more difficult to account for the perfect indifference with which we often look on persons and places for the first time, that, subsequently, become dearer than the lifeblood in the veins, or more hateful than the cause of all sin and sorrow within us. Our eyes look carelessly at other eyes that will one day be as load-stars to ours. How is it that their glance is negative *now*? That we

are as impassive as wood while their gaze is on us? We listen, *now*, unmoved to a voice; as the deaf adder, we hear not the charm thereof;—a year hence, and there shall be no tone of that voice that shall not make our heart-strings vibrate in responsive harmony, or jar them in harshest discord.

Instead of seeing anything marvellous in instant sympathies and antipathies—in love or hate, at first sight, I marvel much more at the strange unimpressionable state of mind in which we are at the very time when something is happening which should affect us deeply. Only when the time is past, when it is all over, we say, “If I had but known!” Truly does “man walk in a vain shadow, and disquiet himself in vain;” vainly he disquiets himself for a good or an evil that he expects, and that comes not; and for the great events of life—he foresees not their coming—does not even see that they are darkening his present path.

Thus it was that young Margaret Hastings stood for the first time in the oak-parlour at Carleton Castle, and never once thought of herself in connection with it. Indeed, she did not think much about the room; except as regarded its capabilities for being used as a theatre by the boys. Its rich fantastic carving and its handsome bow-window were carelessly looked at. She glanced once at the prospect which the latter presented when Lady Carleton directed her attention to it. But girls of thirteen seldom care for a fine landscape; and all that Margaret saw through the window was the amber light of the western sky, blending with the clear blue of the zenith,—and midway in the beautiful concave, the full moon, hanging over the neglected garden below the terrace. She thought, as she looked, of the poor lady hiding there on such a night; and waiting hour after hour till the nurse should escape to her with the children. She wondered whether the window through which she then looked was the one at which the countess tapped at last, and where she was met, face to face, by her cruel husband. There was something in the story of the late countess’s sufferings which was exquisitely painful to Margaret. She thought, perhaps, *this* was the very window,

and she turned away from it.—Lady Carleton was looking over a letter, and said to her,—

“Now, Maggie, I will read you the rest of Arundel’s letter. I could not read it before Miss Price and Reginald, as they are two of the persons whom he wishes to surprise with his play. Let me see! I read all that about the new music he has got—‘Mozart,’ ‘Requiem,’ ‘Try it together.’ Ah! we shall see about that—humph—‘Rousseau!’—humph—Oh! this is what he says about the play.

“‘If the room I think of will do, have all the packages I send taken into it unknown to papa. I know you tell papa everything, but you must not tell him that there is anything going on in those old rooms. It will spoil all if you do. Frank is such a splendid actor. I want you and papa to see him in perfection. I don’t believe Roscius was up to him; and John Kemble cannot play Romeo as Frank can,—though he *is* the fashion. I don’t like him; he’s a great deal too stiff—not a bit like an Italian lover! We used to see those fellows figuring away in the moonlight. They did their business in a very different style from Mr. Kemble. I dare say you think—[and here the countess read on awhile to herself, not deeming all that her son had written quite suited to Maggie’s age. That young lady looked about, meanwhile, among the strange carvings, and out through the window, during these judicious suppressions, which I may as well give the reader, as the whole letter is characteristic of Arundel at sixteen]—*bellissima madre mia*, that Frank and I were too young to understand what love-making meant then; but you forget that we associated with all classes of people; and we went to the *churches* every day, and the *opera* almost every night. Again, sweet mother mine, I dare say you think that schoolboys can’t know very much about love-making. My darling innocent mother! We boys at Eton call ourselves men. Thanks to François and James Hastings, Frank and I have learned that to be *manly* as some of these fellows are, is the height of stupidity. We have got into scrapes often enough; I’m in debt now, and have got a bothering letter to

write to my father about it—asking for money and forgiveness, and all that. I never can make my allowance do. I want lots of things Frank don't care for. He is very good about money matters, and has a head for business. But I am really more *rangé* than he is. I'm obliged to be, or I could do no work.

“I am reading Milton's prose works, now (making some comparisons of my own—probably all wrong—between him and Demosthenes), and I came upon these passages, which may help you to bear the idea, of our going (as we so soon shall go) out of this little wicked world of school, into that big one where my father and the rest of the great guns are firing cannonades every day. The Puritan-poet says, and mark the music of his speech, even in prose (what an ear and touch for the organ he must have had!), “He that can apprehend and consider vice, with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true wayfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary. That virtue, therefore, which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and regrets it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure.”

“I have had a terribly depressing headache ever since the examinations, and yesterday I felt so stupid that I really did not know what I was about. To-day I am a little better. François has given me some strong coffee, and I am able to sit up and write to you. That is the easiest pleasure I can get at. I will see Dr. Ward before we go down to join you at Carleton.

“The play we have fixed on is “Romeo and Juliet.” Frank is the Romeo, of course. Now, I want to be Mercutio, and to have Sophia Hastings for the Juliet. Maggie is a great deal too young, and has no more idea of being in love than this pen. But James Hastings says his father will object to Sophia's acting, and that I must be Juliet, and he will be



Meroutio. I got into a rage when they told me I should *look* Juliet very well. They tease diabolically. Try and talk the rector over. Sophia is so pretty; and I have a notion that she would not object to act Juliet to Frank's Romeo.'

"Now, Maggie, you may listen again."

"Yes! But—did you hear a noise just now?"

"Yes; I think something drove into the front court. Where was I? It is getting quite dark; I can scarcely see. Oh, 'Romeo. As it is to be a strictly private performance, in our own house, there cannot even be the ghost of——'"

Maggie here uttered a gasping sound, and flung herself, trembling and pale, into Lady Carleton's arms.

"What is it, my dear?" exclaimed the latter, half frightened herself, rising, and looking round the gloomy apartment. "Did you see anything? Where? What was it?" Maggie could not speak for a moment: she pointed towards the window; but without looking that way.

"Did you see some one at the window, my darling? It must have been one of the servants."

"Oh, no!" said Maggie, distinctly; keeping her face still buried on the countess's bosom.

"Who was it, then?—Do you know? Speak, Maggie! This is foolish."

Maggie looked up and tried to speak.

"I heard a tapping on the window. Some one—dressed like a boy—with a beautiful face—but, oh! so pale and mournful!—looked in. *There!* just at that corner. I saw it *twice*. Indeed, indeed I did!" said the trembling girl, getting courage as she spoke.

"You must have been deceived, my darling. You are over-excited; these old rooms and the thoughts about the poor countess and her escape have conspired to make my Maggie a coward. Come closer to the window, dear! We will open it wider, and you shall see that what you have mistaken for a human figure is nothing but a branch of ivy waving in the breeze."

Lady Carleton soothed and supported poor Maggie, who did

not seem to be convinced of the truth of the explanation. Still she allowed herself to be led to the window, and looked at the great waving branch which the countess pointed out.

"Do you see now, Maggie, how easy it is for our senses to deceive us? When I was a girl of your age, I was once much frightened by seeing——"

Margaret grasped her arm convulsively.

"There! There! Look! It is there again! Ah!"

Lady Carleton saw the object of Margaret's terror, then.

A tall youth was looking in at the window; stealthily peering from behind one of the heavy mullions. The countenance was indeed beautiful; but pallid, and utterly devoid of expression—except that of fixed dejection.

Blank, meaningless, frightfully changed as it was, Lady Carleton needed not a second glance at that face to comprehend the whole truth.

"Merciful God!" she murmured, as the large vacant eyes stared in on her again. "He does not know me!" And stretching her arms eagerly towards the retreating figure, she cried out in a tremulous voice: "Arundel! my child! Arundel!"

Still the boy retreated; and she saw him run hurriedly down the steps into the dark garden. The wretched mother stood gazing into the evening gloom. She passed her hand over her eyes to be assured that she was not dreaming. Margaret was there beside her.

"Did *you* see him go down those steps, Maggie?" she asked in a faint voice.

"Yes. Was it, indeed, Arundel? I thought I had seen the face before. What is the matter with him? How strange he looked; and he did not come when you called."

At this moment old Cuthbert came hurriedly into the room, but without the lights.—"Oh, my lady.—Such a surprise!—My lord drove up to the hall-door just now in a post-chaise. I think he is coming *here*."

"Yes. That is his step. You may go, Cuthbert. Maggie," she whispered softly, "are you afraid to go into

that garden and see if you can find Arundel, and bring him here?"

"Afraid! Oh, no! not afraid of Arundel! I thought it was something else. I will bring him back, dear Lady Carleton." And the blood returned to Maggie's cheek, and courage to her heart, as she sprang out on to the terrace, leaving Lady Carleton standing in expectation of her husband's entrance.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE END OF A HAPPY DAY.

"No bliss so great but runneth to an end,  
No hap so hard but may in time amend."

SOUTHWELL.

"The fining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold, but the Lord trieth the hearts."  
*Proverbs.*

He came in slowly, with an uncertain step. It was almost dark, but she saw him distinctly. There is always light enough to see those we love. He paused, and looked round the desolate apartment. She remembered that this had been his mother's room, and that all those sad events of his childhood which he had once confided to her had taken place here. She did not wonder that a throng of sorrowful memories had arrested him on the threshold; beating back for a moment the new sorrow which she felt, full surely, he had come to impart to her. She knew the worst now. She had tried to anticipate it; for had not Dr. Ward and other physicians told her that this evil might befall them? She thought she had prepared her mind for it. But she learned now that no amount of preparation will blunt the edge of grief when it pierces the loving heart. "Alas! in every sorrow there is something new!" She stood still, and watched Lord Carleton. There was a vague sort of sympathetic understanding in her mind.

"He is thinking of the old by-gone days!—of his unhappy

mother! He has forgotten his child for the moment! *Why did I come into these rooms to-night?*" Presently she felt that her husband was at her side; that he had taken her hand.

"Are you alone, Caroline?" he asked, glancing once more round the gloomy apartment. She bowed her head; for no words would come.

"Why are you silent?" He folded her in his arms, and kissed her forehead. He was surprised at this reception; he had prepared himself for joyful congratulations which he should have to turn into sadness. He had tasted the bitterness of his lot, in anticipation, as he drove down from London. But there was no smile for him—no word of joy for his success!

"How is this, my love? I expected to find you gay. You had the newspapers and my letter this morning? Is there anything the matter *here*? The servants told me, just now, that you were well, better than usual, indeed. What is it?"—And with a gentle hand he turned her face upwards, that he might read its expression. The action was lover-like, and so were the two kisses which descended on the drooping lids that would not raise themselves, lest he should see the tears beneath.

"Trembling, and in tears, Caroline! What is this grief? I, too, had a grief to tell; but let me hear yours first."

"I know all!" she murmured. "Arundel, my darling!"—And burying her face in his bosom, she wept silently, but with such convulsive tremor as threatened to shatter her frail body. Lord Carleton was overcome with sympathy, and could find no words of consolation. He held her tightly folded to his heart, and waited till the passionate grief should subside a little.

Banquets, balls, public meetings of various kinds were at that moment going on all over the kingdom, in honour of the new minister, from whom much was expected. His health and happiness and honour were the theme of many a toast and speech. Throughout the length and breadth of the land he was applauded, admired, and envied. He had gained a

position in the eyes of the world which the world thought worth having. And the world cried vehemently—"What a fortunate man! Long live the Earl of Carleton!" The world could not know that its *ricats* had no power to gladden his heart; that, even on the day of his triumph, they were overpowered by a sound of lamentation and woe within the sacred circle of his home.

When she was somewhat calmer, he said in a quiet tone—"How did you know this?"

"I have seen him."

"Impossible! I left him in London ten hours ago."

"I have seen him. Not ten minutes since he stared at me through that window, a witless creature. My sweet Arundel! my beautiful son! That had not his like in the whole world!" She covered her face with her hands.

"This is some delusion. Why are you in these old rooms? They are full of melancholy, and disturb the brain. You cannot have *seen* poor Arundel. It is impossible! I came to tell you—to prepare you for seeing him to-morrow. He is in St. James's Square with François;—your presentiment is right—he has lost his reason."

"I know it. It is no presentiment. Tell me——"

At this moment old Cuthbert came in with lights. After placing them on a table he stopped a moment, and then said, as if he knew the interruption would not be welcome, though it *must* be made, "My lord, Bennett wishes to know if you can speak with him for a few minutes, immediately. He has something of importance to say. He is waiting in the next room."

"I will come." Then turning to the countess, he said—"I have much to say to you, and but little time to say it in. I will be back in a few minutes."

As soon as he was gone she dragged herself to the window, and leaning against one of the mullions, looked out along the moonlit terrace for Margaret and her boy. The recollection of that face made her shudder. Suddenly the thought came across her—"Shall I have to get used to that? Must I bear

that face through all the coming years of his life—with the recollection of what he was? Oh, Arundel! come! come to your mother's heart, and let her love warm you into intelligence again!" She paused, and pressing her hands over her bosom, whispered softly—"Not *that* way is there peace or salvation for him! Oh, thou faithless, passionate heart! Is there not a good and mighty God who ordereth all things in heaven and earth? Doth He afflict thee for His pleasure, or for thy profit? Teach me to love Thy will. Be merciful unto me, O Lord, for I am in trouble."

The earl returned after a few minutes' absence. "You are right, I have no doubt, my love!" he said, joining her at the window. "You may have seen our poor child. They are searching for him now. I find that he escaped from the house before we left London. He got up at the back of the chaise unperceived by Bennett. With the cunning which so often accompanies this disorder, he contrived to keep out of sight whenever we stopped to change horses. This journey will probably do him no harm, but rather help to tranquillise his nervous system, which has been overwrought lately by intense application to studies of a kind very unsuited to his age, and to which it seems no one thought he was addicted. François has been negligent, I think. He is full of self-reproach, however; and I confess I myself should not have suspected a boy like Arundel (who was working for prizes at school, too) of perplexing his brain with all the wild political and social errors of Rousseau and the French encyclopedists. It seems that modern democracy and ultra views on all social subjects have been seething in that poor child's head for the last six months. It is no wonder he has lost his reason!"

"I had a letter from him three days since," sighed the poor mother.

"Does he show any signs of mental disorder in it?"

"No; but complains of various physical ailments which precede his disorder. How long does Dr. Ward think this attack will last?" she asked, scarcely daring to look at her husband.

"Several months. But—Caroline—if he be not cured within a year——"

She cast down her eyes, and made no reply. She knew too well the dreadful alternative. Lord Carleton told all that he knew, and more that he had reason to hope, in favour of Arundel's recovery in the course of a few months. "In that case, Dr. Ward believes that this temporary obscuration, or rather *inaction*, of the intellectual faculties will have been of the greatest benefit to his after-life. He has no doubt that his brain will be much strengthened by it; in short, that this is merely a prolonged sleep of the mind, which Nature has prescribed after the unnatural exertions to which it has been subjected. Arundel is but a boy; but there are some grown men among us whom these mad French *philosophes* are making as insane as themselves. I cannot control them as I can my poor child, nor can I hope for their recovery as I do confidently for his. Now I must leave you, love, for a short time to look for him. Bennett says he saw him run from the back of the carriage towards this old garden, as we drove up the avenue."

"You need not go, Frederick. See, there they come!" said Lady Carleton, pointing out on the terrace.

"Who is that with him?"

"Little Maggie Hastings. I sent her to find him. How slowly he moves! Perhaps he has hurt himself!" And she was about to run out to meet them.

Her husband laid his hand on her arm. "Stay where you are. He has an aversion to entering a house. She is leading him forward with difficulty. If we show ourselves he will fear that we are going to take him prisoner—he will escape from her once more, and we may not find him all night. Stand back, out of sight, till they are fairly in the room. I will then fasten the windows."

"Does he recognise no one?" asked the mother, with all a mother's pity in her accents.

"No one. Hark, he is singing! The only thing in which his intelligence is as clear as ever is music. All yesterday he

roamed about the house with the score of Mozart's 'Requiem' in his hand. His voice is not changed."

"Hark! Yes; it is a passage from the 'Requiem' he is singing now," said his mother, pressing forward.

"Stand back! out of the light. Don't let him see you, Caroline!" he whispered. "Let the girl push back the window. If we startle him, he will be away in a moment."

Lady Carleton sat down on a low couch that stood in the shadow, and her husband placed himself beside her, while Margaret led her captive up to the window. He stopped before it and looked in, with a childish curiosity in his face. Margaret held him by the hand, and tried to coax him in.

"Come and see what a pretty place it is," she said, advancing a step through the open window, and pointing to the carved figures on the walls.

He stared vacantly at her. "I can't come in," he said quickly.

"Why not?" asked Maggie, cheerfully; but Lady Carleton saw by the flickering candlelight that she was as white as her frock.

"It hurts me *here*." And he laid his hand on the top of his head.

"It won't hurt you for a minute. Come and look at these beautiful things! And I will sing to you," said Margaret.

"Sing!" he repeated, as if pondering the meaning of the word. At this moment his mother controlled her heart firmly, and commenced singing the same portion of Mozart's "Requiem" which she had heard him sing just before. Her voice resounded with preternatural sweetness through the deserted room. Lord Carleton stood rooted to the spot, and Maggie's tears flowed down her cheeks while they both watched the effect of the music upon Arundel. At the first sound he turned his eyes to the quarter from whence it arose: but he saw no one. As the air proceeded, it seemed to attract him just as the music of the Hindoo's flute attracts the serpent. He stepped through the window—his form was drawn up fully (it had been dejected and slouching before)—



his eyes brightened; and there was an expression of delight in his face. Presently he joined in it, and at every bar advanced further into the room, with his beautiful eyes fixed on the point from which the voice that enchanted him seemed to come. At length he saw his mother. He gazed on her with a smile, but it was not one of recognition.

Lady Carleton continued the strain, and in a few moments her son was kneeling at her feet and looking up into her face. She could scarcely bear that look. There was no intelligence in it—no affection. It was all curiosity and childish delight. She took his hands (still continuing the singing)—they were cold as marble—and she pressed them to her bosom. In vain she tried to control her feelings. She could bear it no longer; but ceased suddenly, and clasping her child in her arms, shed a mingled torrent of tears and kisses on his head. The poor boy understood nothing; but an emotion like commiseration seemed to steal into his mind as he saw his mother's tears.

"Why do you cry? I never cry! Who are you?"

"Your mother, my darling."

He shook his head. "No mother—Arundel has no mother! Do you love him?"

Poor Lady Carleton fell forward in a fainting fit.

The earl raised her in his arms, and laid her on the couch. The boy still knelt in the same place, and watched his father's movements with an unintelligent smile, that was shocking to see. His long, dark hair, damp with the evening dew, hung in disorder round his head like a woman's. As he knelt, looking helpless and dejected, the attitude might be taken for that of despair, and Maggie's romantic imagination recurred again to the story of the old countess.

Lord Carleton, too, seemed struck by the boy's attitude, and looked at him for some minutes in silence, and with a countenance full of emotion. There was memory as well as present grief at work in his heart; for he remembered but too well his beloved mother's appearance in her disguise on that fatal evening. He, a child, had seen her kneel, almost on that very spot, and receive a brutal blow in answer to her

heart-broken supplication. He looked half wildly round the room as fancy pictured the events of that night, and his eye fell now on the figure of the young girl standing in an attitude strongly expressive of pity, mingled with reverence. There was something in her look which made him start.

"Good God!" he said to himself; "how like Margaret when I first saw her! Am I to be driven mad by likenesses and fancies?" He stared at her for some minutes, and then spoke in a harsh tone.

"You need not stay, Lady Carleton is ill. Send some one with water immediately."

Thus dismissed, Margaret left the room with a bursting heart.

"It is very unkind of Lord Carleton to send me away so!" she thought to herself. "As if *I* did not care for Lady Carleton and Arundel! Oh, what has come to Arundel! Poor Lady Carleton!" And the indignant young spirit forgot its sense of injustice at the thought of the deep grief of those she loved. Margaret was too generous, even then, to spend much feeling upon herself. She hastened, as well as she could, through the unfamiliar rooms and the dark corridors, finding her way by instinct. At last she emerged into the great hall, which was lighted. Some men-servants were talking in a group near the door. She stepped towards them, and her young voice had lost its usual clearness, as she said aloud,—

"Lord Carleton desires that some water may be taken to her ladyship. She has fainted. Let some one fetch Mrs. Fenton, or Justine, immediately. I will tell Miss Price. Take the water as soon as possible! Cuthbert, you know the way! —Lord and Lady Carleton are in the oak-parlour."

A general stir was created by this announcement, and the group dispersed. As Margaret was going more slowly than usual up the staircase, some one came after her. It was Bennett, Lord Carleton's man.

"Miss Margaret, do you know if anything has been seen of Mr. Arundel?"

"He is with Lord and Lady Carleton."

"Oh, thank you, miss!" The man seemed much relieved, and ran down the stairs again. She proceeded up-stairs, musing painfully on the dreadful change that had come over Arundel. That he had lost his reason and knew no one, she felt, without understanding it thoroughly. How could she believe that her beautiful and accomplished friend—who was all she could imagine of intellectual power and brightness in a boy—was now no better than poor Jemmy Blake the village idiot, who sat all day in the sun, balancing a straw—and laughed merrily when he saw his father's funeral!

When she re-entered the countess's parlour she found her brother James sitting with Miss Price. She sprang into his arms, and burst into tears; she could not speak.

"Have you seen Arundel, darling?" he asked.

"Yes," she sobbed.

"Is he with his parents?"

"Yes—oh yes."

"Don't be frightened, dear Miss Price. Lady Carleton is ill. Lord Carleton is with her, and I have sent Mrs. Fenton and Justine."

"Very well, my dear!—Good-night! James has come to take you home. Naldo went away some time since. Good-night!—How pale she is! James my dear, give her a glass of wine. Poor Maggie! I must go to Lady Carleton. I think you had better ring and order a carriage. Good-night!"

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## CHAPTER V.

## THE DAWN OF ANOTHER DAY.

"Not always fall of leaf, nor ever spring,  
Not endless night, nor yet eternal day;  
The saddest birds a season find to sing,  
The roughest storm a calm may soon allay.  
Thus with succeeding turns God tempereth all,  
That man may hope to rise and fear to fall."

AN hour or two later that night, when the household at the castle were all gone to bed except the earl, who was still occupied in his library—reading letter after letter, and writing on the back of each the summary of the answer to be written in due form by his secretary on the morrow—he came across a letter which arrested his attention for a longer time than the others. He looked at the address many times before he broke the seal. At last he tore it open, and an enclosure fell to the ground. He picked it up. It was addressed to his wife. He laid it on the table, with a strange look of curiosity. His brows were knit, as he turned over the envelope again and again, and found no word within it addressed to himself. This letter seemed to put a sudden stop to the transaction of the public business before him. He opened no more letters, though there were many waiting their turn for inspection, but took up that little letter, and turned it over and over, and sat musing with it in his hand. He was surprised by the sound of some one opening the door, and hurriedly throwing down the letter (as if he had been caught in the act of opening it), he seized another and broke the seal, as his wife entered the room. She was wrapped in a dressing-gown, and looked comfortless and weary.

"May I come in?—I could not sleep. My fire is out. I will not interrupt you. I will sit here,—out of sight, and warm myself till you have finished." She stooped as she passed his chair, and touched his cheek.

"What a weary world of letters to wade through! Surely I can help you; at least, in *opening* them. What a graceful handwriting! Surely *that* is not a man's!"

"No. It is merely franked to me. The letter is for you;" and he handed it to her.

"I do not know the writing," said Lady Carleton; the sadness of her face giving place to a faint expression of curiosity. "Do you know whose it is?"

"It is Miss Hastings' hand," the earl replied, writing as he spoke, on the letter he had just opened.

"Oh!" said the countess; and seating herself she slowly broke the seal and read as follows;—her husband all the time was busily opening and endorsing letters.

"DEAR LADY CARLETON,—I have just heard from Dr. Ward of your son's affliction. I will not waste time by the expression of my sincere sympathy with your grief, but will at once do what he suggests I should do in this emergency. You have already heard from him and others that I have devoted much time to the study of mental derangement. Dr. Ward believes that in many cases of temporary insanity, monomania, and idiocy, I exercise a favourable effect on his patients. He is somewhat puzzled about the treatment to be adopted for your son, and has consulted with me upon the subject. To confine him with strangers would prolong, if not confirm, his malady. To allow him to remain at large, in such an establishment as yours in London, or even at Carleton Castle, would be attended with much danger. A quiet but not solitary life is what he requires. He should not see strangers, but should be subject to continual surveillance of those who love him and know how to treat his disease. But he should not be suffered to feel any personal restraint, or be conscious of the surveillance. He should roam freely about the house, and be as much in the open air as possible. It is also necessary that he should reside near London, in order that Dr. Ward may see him frequently. All these things, and more to the same effect, will be said to you by the good doctor when you meet. Knowing this, I cannot help hoping that you will be favourably inclined to a plan which has occurred to me, and which Dr. Ward entirely approves. I propose that you should send Arundel to me during his illness,

and I will spare no pains to second Dr. Ward's efforts for his recovery. My house at Brompton is within a convenient distance for you to visit him daily, and for the doctor to come as often as he wishes. It is also very quiet, retired and healthy—in fact, just the sort of place for such a patient. Since my mother's death, I have more leisure than I well know how to dispose of, and it would be truly kind in you to let me employ some time and thought upon so interesting a patient as young Arundel Raby. Do not fear that it will occasion any inconvenience in my household to receive him. My servants have not enough to do, and I have several rooms which I do not use, so that I can easily accommodate your son and his attendants. If you and the Earl of Carleton should dislike the idea of my incurring additional expense on your son's account (which it is quite reasonable that you should), let me remove that difficulty by saying that I will receive any sum of money which you and Dr. Ward shall agree that I ought to receive, in consideration of the expense and trouble I incur.—I cannot scruple to do this, as, in that case, I shall appropriate the money to my poor pensioners in the — Asylum. I have briefly and somewhat awkwardly expressed my wish to be of service on this occasion. Will you think over it, and consult Lord Carleton and Dr. Ward; but before you decide *against* me, I hope that you will drive down here, and see what a quiet little nest I offer for your wounded bird, and let me say *viva voce* many more things that I can ever say in a letter. It is many years since I wrote one of this length.

"It is true, is it not, that Lord Carleton is our new — ? I congratulate the country—and you—and him. From all that I hear of Arundel's case, there is every reason to hope for his speedy recovery. With kind compliments to Lord Carleton and yourself,

"I am, dear Lady Carleton,

"Yours very sincerely,

"MARGARET HASTINGS."

When Lady Carleton had finished reading this letter, she

looked at her husband. He was quite absorbed in the perusal of a document of considerable length; she turned to the fire, and sat looking at it, with the open letter in her lap. Whenever Lord Carleton made more than usual rustle among the papers, she turned her head, but he seemed to have forgotten her presence. She determined to wait till he had finished his business. Another hour passed away before the last packet of letters was tied up and placed in the travelling box. When he had turned the key, and put it in his pocket, he seemed for the first time to remember her.

"What! are you here yet? You ought to be in bed, my dear, after the excitement of this day, too. You saw Arundel asleep?"

"No. He was not asleep. Bennett sits up in his room to-night. I would not have him left. He must be very tired; indeed, he seems so—yet his eyes never closed all the time I was there. I am so ignorant of the right method of treating him!"

"Of course you are, my love. Is that any reproach to you? We must see Dr. Ward immediately about it. He talked to me for a few moments; but I was waiting to go to his Majesty, and had no time then. I begged him to dine with us to-morrow in town, and then we can arrange all that is necessary. I have only two primary conditions to stipulate in his treatment. He shall not be sent where there are other persons similarly afflicted; and he shall not be exposed to the remarks—perhaps, the foolish teasing, of servants and strangers in our own house. We shall have some difficulty in procuring a proper residence for him; but Dr. Ward may be able to assist us. I have a horror of the common run of people who offer to take charge of nervous or imbecile patients. They are generally mercenary, often cruel—they can rarely take a genuine hearty interest in the recovery of the patient. Good God! it makes my blood freeze to think of the thousand cruel slights and indignities that our poor boy might be subjected to at the hands of hirelings! Money, that in this world is so powerful, often fails in cases such as these; for the more we pay to the mer-

cenary guardians of an idiot, the more is it their interest to keep him in a state of idiocy. I wonder whether Dr. Ward could be induced to receive him into his own house. But then he has no wife—no daughter—he must trust to servants—to the uneducated. Stay—could we not do this? Take a house near London, in a quiet place—say at Chelsea or Kensington—and let Miss Price and François take charge of him there, under Dr. Ward's superintendence?"

"Why may not *I* take charge of him?" asked the mother, somewhat sharply.

"If you wish it. I had thought the task would be very painful to you; and it is, I know, thought best that such patients should not be with their nearest friends. From many causes they are better with strangers. Besides, Caroline, my new position will require you to take a more active part in the political and fashionable circles than you have done lately. Trust me, dear one, there is nothing very desperate in Arundel's case! I understand the subject well enough to know that he will be better away from his own family. We will ask Dr. Ward to suggest a plan."

"Has he not suggested one to you already?" asked the countess, significantly.

"I had scarcely a moment so see him. We had no time to talk of a plan. What do you mean?"

"Do you not know what is in this letter?" she asked, with a futile attempt at a smile.

"How should I know? It is not written outside."

"Read the contents then, and tell me what you think of them."

Lord Carleton sat down again and deliberately perused Miss Hastings' letter. His wife watched his face the whole time. She saw the flush which came over its usual pallor, and the bright light of the wearied eye, as he folded it in silence, and returned it to her. They both sat looking into the fire for some time.

"What do you think of that letter, Frederick?" asked the countess, laying her hand upon his, and speaking softly.



"What do *you* think of it?" he asked, suddenly looking round on her with his penetrating eyes.

She did not shrink from the look, but replied firmly, "I think it is a noble and a generous letter. I think Miss Hastings is unlike most women—better than most."

"And I *know* you are right!"—he said in a fervid tone, and took the little hand between his own and pressed it.

"I think we ought to accept the proposal with gratitude," she continued.

"That is, indeed, the only proper way of meeting a noble and generous proposal."

"I wish I could make some adequate return to Miss Hastings. But she is so much my superior, that it is out of my power."

"You can love her, Caroline."

"Nay; that would be presumptuous and audacious in so frivolous a being. I leave that to *you*;" and one of the old smiles, full of playful *malice*, lighted up her face.

It was a safe sally, though Lord Carleton frowned slightly. She rose, and winding her arm round his neck, looked with the same smile into his eyes.

"Come, you must not be angry because I am not a noble, generous, and magnanimous woman like *somebody*."

"I should be sorry if you were like anybody but yourself."

"But, seriously, Frederick, I honour you for having had sense enough to admire such a woman when you were a boy. It does you great credit, and I envy her."

He took her in his arms.

"You envy her? Why?"

"Because you will always remember her as a noble, poetical, heroic sort of woman; unattainable, and, therefore, for ever fresh and fair to your memory."

"Granted—*et puis*?"

"I would wish to be remembered *so*."

"Remembered! Wait till the time of remembrance comes. I would rather see you, and hold you thus, and hear you

utter generous praise of the generous, than *remember* you. Don't let us talk of remembering each other yet, love."

"You have not told me what you think of Miss Hastings' letter?" she said again.

"I think that there are many more heroic women in the world than the world gives itself credit for; and that there is no better, nobler, more generous, more amiable, more charming woman than my wife. Let us talk over the letter on our road to town to-morrow, or, rather, to-day, for—Look here," and he advanced to the window, behind which a grey sky had been brightening for the last half-hour, and drawing back the curtain, he quoted a description of early morning that had been a favourite with him ever since he had learned it from the lips of Margaret Hastings. It begins thus:

"Now the day begins to break,  
And the light shoots like a streak  
Of subtle fire. The wind blows cold,  
While the morning doth unfold——"

Little they thought, as they stood together looking over the wide park, that they should never stand there together any more.

## CHAPTER VI.

LITTLE NALDO.

"'Tis for some advantage, on the whole, that nature acts in this manner."  
M. ANTONINUS.

"For never wouldst thou have made anything if thou hadst hated it,  
O Lord, thou lover of souls."  
JESUS, *Son of Sirach*.

To the younger Margaret Hastings, my aunt, life was always full, earnest, and heartfelt. Sorrows came to her—many and great sorrows—in her fourteenth year, and she grieved as only the young can grieve. Let those to whom years have brought the philosophic mind, or that toughness of nerve and dulness of sensation which so often does duty for it among respectable, middle-aged people,—let such among my readers

try to recall the acuteness of their feelings in early youth, when every grief was a pang and every joy an ecstasy, and they may form some conception of the poor girl's initiation into that grand mysterious sorrow which gave power and purpose to her life. When she understood the real nature of Arundel Raby's disorder, a strange grief crept over her—a grief compounded of tender pity, shrinking terror, and an almost superstitious veneration. At one time she tried to shut out the remembrance of his face as she had seen it in the oak-parlour; at another time she reproached herself with want of consistent love in this cowardly shrinking from the thought of his affliction. Day by day her thoughts entwined themselves round the image of her idolised friend. There was not in her affection a particle of any sort of love, conscious or unconscious, but the love of a sister for a very clever and amiable elder brother. Except, indeed, that Maggie had a reverence for Arundel which she could not have had for a *brother*, because she saw him seldom, and always in the *holidays*—those red-letter days of life. She looked upon him as being in every way superior to herself. Her heart and brain were both terribly shaken when she pictured to herself this perfect creature, stricken like the sinful Nebuchadnezzar, and made "even as the brutes;" and asked herself if this was *God's will*.

Poor young Margaret! Her secret struggles of faith, because of Arundel Raby's affliction, brought on the first—I believe, the only serious—illness of her life. From this illness she recovered to face her next sorrow—the death of Reginald. It was not the approaching *death* of little Naldo that gave Maggie the intense pain she felt in nursing him, for she did not know he was dying; it was the child's peculiar state of mind in his last illness which she alone of all the family was aware of. This state of mind must have produced a great effect upon her future character—as may be gathered from the following conversation between these two young creatures, one of whom may be considered as a type of health, the other of disease.

"When we are living together in our little house in the

wood, Naldo," said Maggie, "and you are writing beautiful books, and are a celebrated author, we shall be very happy. Won't it be a proud day for you, little Naldo, when you sit in the midst of the strong and learned men and the beautiful ladies who will come to visit Reginald Hastings, the great author, and they see how weak a body you have, never being able to go about the world to get knowledge as they have done, and yet have beaten them all?"

"Go on, Maggie! go on! I love to hear you talk so! It sounds like a trumpet!"

Maggie went on painting imaginary scenes of future honour and glory to Reginald, ending thus: "You feel that it will all come true, Naldo, don't you?"

"Sometimes," murmured the child, "when *you* talk to me about it. I do love my darling books very much; and indeed, indeed, Maggie, when I know enough I mean to write books. But still——"

"Well, darling, what is it?" And another affectionate kiss, another pressure of the feeble body to Maggie's warm heart, brought out the truth in a gush of tears.

"Oh dear, oh dear! If I could only grow up into a *strong* man, I would not care if I was as stupid as William Grey. Is it very wicked, Maggie? I know God has made me *so*. But I wish He hadn't!" And the little hand was clenched, and the broad brow contracted. "You say I ought to be thankful to God for having made me at all," he went on, in a sullen whisper; "but I am *not*. I can't help trying to find out *why* God let that fall do me so much harm. You say God is always good and merciful. Do you think there is anything good and merciful in that, Maggie? I hadn't done any harm when I was a baby—had I?" And his eyes sought hers with a strange fierceness.

Margaret grew rather pale, but she did not shrink from his scrutiny.

"Naldo, dear, this *is* wicked. You must not talk so."

"But I *think* so. I can't help my thoughts."

"Oh, yes, you can! Every person can help his thoughts.

Have you never tried to leave off thinking about a story when you had a lesson to learn?"

"Oh, yes; I can do *that*. But this is different—very different, Maggie. I never told anybody else what I think about God's not being as kind to me as He is to all the others. I feel it is wicked; it makes me hot and angry, and ready to wish you were all as I am. When I say my prayers I don't thank God, *in my heart*, for having brought me safely to the close of another day. I often really wish I had died in the day."

Margaret's eyes filled with tears as she pressed her lips to Reginald's. She was quite frightened at this revelation of feeling; she feared that God would be angry with her brother, but *she* pitied him too much to be angry. Besides, she was shocked at her own sympathy with him. "What harm *had* Naldo done when he was a baby to be afflicted thus?" And that thought brought another—"What harm had Arundel done that he should be made imbecile?"

Naldo's dark face cleared as he looked at her. "What are you crying for, Maggie?"

"Because you are so unhappy, darling." She thought it unkind to say *so wicked*. "Nobody can be happy who does not love God."

"But loving God would not make me happy—nothing but being strong and straight like other boys would make me happy. Oh, Maggie, you cannot tell what it is to be as I am." And a tear rolled down the flushed cheek. "Sometimes I feel as if I cared for nobody in the world—not even for you; and then I think all these bad things against God, and wish I were dead, or had never been born—anything, not to be what I am. I should not mind it so much, you know, if I were a girl, or if I wanted to live quietly in the country all my life; but I want to sail round the world—to climb up high mountains—to discover new places—to go where no one ever went before. Most of all, Maggie—you won't tell papa or mamma, will you?"

Maggie assured him that she should not think it right to

repeat any of the things he told her in confidence. She had a great idea of keeping a secret.

"I would like to be like Bonaparte."

Margaret started—a start half surprise, half sympathy.

"Yes, Maggie. When I lie on the sofa in the evening, and they think I am asleep, I am listening to every word papa reads out of the newspapers. I know all about the emperor—'Corsican usurper,' papa *calls* him. Papa little thinks when he's talking against him that I am for him!"—He brightened up and smiled. "I am always so glad when he gains a battle. If I were like other boys, I would be an English Bonaparte when I grow up. It's a fine thing to make oneself an emperor, and lead conquering armies all over Europe."

It was a fortunate thing for Reginald that Maggie at once confessed that she shared his secret admiration for Napoleon Bonaparte, and led him to talk on the subject, and forget his griefs and repinings. She found her own enthusiasm cool and tame compared with his. He remembered everything he had ever heard or read about his hero; and related a variety of anecdotes which she did not know. He composed a number of imaginary scenes between him and his generals, and threw no small amount of dramatic talent into them. At last, after talking long and eagerly, he sank back exhausted, murmuring,—

"But what is the use of my thinking of all these things? I can never *do* any of them."

Then it was that Maggie felt moved to speak to him about the trouble which his irreligious feelings had produced in her mind.

"Oh, Naldo, dear! I would not have papa and mamma know what you think and feel for all the world! And yet, perhaps, it might do you good if they were to talk to you and show you how wrong it is. It would make you happier. I cannot bear to think of all you said. Perhaps you did not mean it. You spoke in a pet."

"I *did* mean it, though," said Naldo, in a feeble, sorrow-

ful voice. "I cannot tell a lie, even though it would please you. If I am really wicked—and I *must* be, if *you* say I am—try and make me good—like you, darling; but don't go and tell papa and mamma. Their talking would only make me worse. I love them dearly, Maggie; but they don't talk to me like you—they don't understand me; I am only a little boy, and they can't make out what is in me."

"Let them try to make out about *this*, Naldo, darling?" implored Maggie, kissing him. "This is so dreadful! Suppose you should die as you are!" and she clasped him convulsively. "Die, not loving God!—You could not go to heaven, you know." And poor Maggie's tears fell fast, and she groaned in spirit.

"No; I *should* go to hell," murmured the boy. "But, Maggie, darling, don't cry about that. I have thought about it often before, and have got not to mind it so much as I did. You know, dear, the Bible says that *many* people are on the broad way to destruction, and few on the narrow path that leadeth to life eternal. Now, I have been thinking that God cannot really be so very merciful to let it be so—indeed, he must be cruel. He *must* be!" And the poor child started up again.

Poor Margaret! She turned pale, and shuddered at what appeared to her the acme of sin; but she still kept her arms round the sinner, and whispered soothing words. "Don't talk any more now, dear; it will do you harm. You are saying such wicked things! you don't know."

"Yes; I *do* know, Maggie. I have thought of them over and over, though I tried not to think of them. You don't suppose I *wanted* to make myself unhappy, do you? If you let me tell you what I have thought, perhaps you can show me that I am wrong. I should be very glad to love God as you do, if I could. Listen to me; and don't cry, or else it will make me cry too."

Thus conjured, Maggie nerved herself to listen.

"Then, tell me all!" she said. "I am sure I shall be able to find some things very wrong in your thoughts. God is

tender-hearted, compassionate, and full of mercy; and I *know* He is so. I feel it, Naldo. Oh, how beautiful everything that He has made is! You said so yourself, darling, to-day, when you were in the garden."

"Yes," replied the child, speaking slowly and thoughtfully. "I wish I could think *that* always; I should be happy then. But," shaking his head in a mournful way, "I can't. All things are *not* beautiful, Maggie. I am not beautiful. Everything about myself and the world and God puzzles me. I try not to think of them, because I know that I am not old enough—have not learned enough to be able to understand them quite; but the more I try not to think of such things, the more the thoughts keep coming and coming to my mind. I can't stop them. I can't understand about God at all. It seems to me there must be two Gods; one good and the other bad. Why do you look so frightened, dear? Shall I leave off?"

"No, no! Go on. *That* is what the wise men of the East used to think." And Margaret found some consolation in the recollection that people mentioned in the Gospels, the Eastern Magi who followed the star to the birthplace of the Saviour, had thought what Naldo thought. It seemed to her as if he had still some hold on the Bible and its promises. It was a childish fancy. "Go on, Naldo. *They* thought so till they were taught better."

"I love the *good* God," continued the boy, solemnly; "I often think of Him when I am not in pain; and I feel how wonderful and powerful He is; and that He loves me. Papa's sermons are almost always about God's goodness and power, and that's why I love being at church—for that, and for the organ. Music makes me love God,—and being out on the hills makes me love God. The sunshine, and every beautiful thing, most of all, darling, *you* make me love God. But then, again, there are other times when I seem to see only the *bad* God. Why do you shiver so, Maggie? I do not *mean* to be wicked. *Can* people really *be* wicked when they don't mean it? If so, then I am *sure* there is something wrong, some-



thing unfair and unjust in—— Well! I won't *say* it, dear."

"But don't *think* it, darling, darling Naldo! Pray, pray don't!" said Maggie, with streaming eyes. "Some day, when you are much wiser than you are now, you will be shocked at what you say."

"Ah!" said Naldo, mournfully, his dark eyes flashing and his lips quivering; "nobody can understand me. Not even you. You don't know what it is to feel miserable, and to have no hope of being happy."

Maggie was silent. She felt that there was a depth in her young brother's affliction which she could not presume to fathom. She did not know the orthodox fashion of treating scepticism in a young mind. It seemed to her a painful disease—not a voluntary evil—a crime.

"You do not know what it is to want to love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, Maggie—to want to see nothing but good, and yet to be obliged to see a great deal of evil—often more evil than good. You are so good and so happy, Maggie, that you have never once thought that God did not love you. Even when you were ill, you know, you told me that you were sure it was for the best. I did not think so. I do not think that everything is for the best. I can't see it at all. I could not see any good in your having a fever—I cannot see any good in my being made a cripple—nor in poor Arundel's being—— Ah,"—and his voice sunk very low here—"that is worse than being as I am! Do you see any good in *that*?—any good, I should like to know, to anybody?—to Lord Merle?—(how wretched he looked the other day when he came here!)—or to his papa and mamma? I heard mamma say to papa, when they thought I was not listening, that she was afraid this attack of Arundel's would be the death of Lady Carleton. Ah, Maggie, you start at that! I suppose you do not see anything very good in Lady Carleton's dying of unhappiness, any more than in poor dear Arundel's being——"

"Don't say it, darling!" said Maggie, hurriedly putting her hand before his mouth.

"Then there are plenty of other things I can see no good in to anybody. Why is Brutus, as you call him, so stupid, when he longs to be clever? Why is he to be sent to college and to be made a clergyman, instead of being a soldier, as he wants? And why is not papa rich enough now to send poor James to college? And, oh, Maggie, Maggie! why am I not strong enough to go out into the world and make a great name and fortune for our family? Surely, surely, it was not the *good* God that made all this. Tell me, Maggie, what *you* think."

Maggie waited a moment, as if to collect her thoughts. She was offering a simple prayer to God that He would be pleased to open her brother's eyes, and let him know the truth. Then she tried to speak clearly.

"Naldo, dear, will you let me tell you something about yourself which seems to me *one* reason why you are so unhappy. It is a fault—a great fault."

"Yes, dear; I do not mind your telling me of my faults. I love you, and I will try to cure them. What is it? I know I am proud and revengeful. I hate people who offend me."

"It is not that, darling. It is that you have no reverence and respect for what you do not understand. You are very clever, and understand more than almost any boy of your age; and when you come to something you can't understand—something that is too high and difficult, you are impatient; you want to *know*, instead of quietly and humbly submitting to be ignorant till God gives you the power to know and understand. You are not humble; you forget that you are but one in many, many millions of creatures that God has made imperfect; and that you cannot, nor can the wisest man, comprehend what His meaning was in making you as He has done. But I think we grow humbler and more full of reverence towards God as we grow older (that *is*, being wiser, papa says), that makes us happier; we learn to wait to understand God's will, and if we cannot get to understand at all, we learn to submit without understanding. If you loved God this would be so easy."

"I think you are right, Maggie." Poor little Naldo had a clear perception in matters of reason—it was remarkable, his father always thought, in so young a child; it was *disease*, and the disease grew stronger as he approached death. "I am not humble, I have no—what you call *reverence*. I really do not care for what I do not understand. You are not like this, Maggie. I see that. You respect things you understand and things you don't understand. You love God—though I don't think you really understand about His wonderful ways better than I do."

"Yes—a little better, I think, Naldo; because I love Him. Loving helps us to understand people, even in this world—does not it? I think, perhaps, we must *love* God before we can understand His will."

"But how can I learn to love God?" said Naldo, sadly.

"By thinking about Him—trying to see His goodness—by praying to Him. Oh, Naldo, darling! if I could but make you feel as I do,—*quite sure* that God loves us all!" And Margaret's face became bright—so bright that Naldo's heart seemed to warm beneath it.

"Maggie, I will try to pray—to love God. Will you pray with me—as you pray by yourself? I do not know how to pray. I can only *say* prayers. That is not what you mean by *praying*, I know. You speak to God—don't you?"

"Yes, darling."

"Will you speak to Him for me now—will you pray to Him now?" asked the boy. "I feel sorry for having proud and conceited and ungrateful thoughts. Oh, Maggie, God has given *you* to me; and He has given me such good parents, and such kind friends, and I have thought always of my being a cripple, and never of you all—I have been ungrateful. Will God ever love me? Shall I ever love God? Oh, if I could, I would not care for anything that happened. Pray for me, Maggie! Do pray for me!" And the poor boy wept.

His sister laid him on his couch, and clasping his hands in hers, she knelt and prayed that God would be pleased to draw

her brother's heart to Himself. What words she used she did not remember, but they produced a powerful effect on little Naldo. Every day during this illness, which was his last, she prayed with him in her simple fashion, and at last he consented to allow her to speak to their father on the subject. "Papa knows so much better, and is so much better than I," she said. "Let me ask mamma to tell him?" Mrs. Hastings was quite alarmed when Margaret told her story, but Mr. Hastings, to his wife's great surprise, did not seem to think that Reginald's case had been so very, very bad.

"It is sinful, my dear; but it is a sort of sinfulness to which clever and audacious young minds are liable. Reginald is precocious, and this terrible attack of scepticism, which does not generally come on till the age of seventeen or eighteen with boys of a reasoning, speculative turn, has shown itself at the very early age of eleven in our poor child. It is a juvenile malady, my dear; strong constitutions always get over it. If their previous training has been healthy, and their moral atmosphere good, it has *ultimately* a beneficial effect. The specious arguments of vulgar infidelity have no effect upon them afterwards. It is a sad thing for poor Naldo:—but what a trial for Maggie! She is full of piety;—and every word of Naldo's must have been a wound! Send *her* to me. Go you to Reginald, and tell him I am coming to have some talk with him. Do not look so solemn, my dear! Do not frighten him—no reproaches. You will not heal the broken heart by harsh words or looks;—you will not draw the timid doubter, and certainly not the proud doubter, to the throne of God by telling him he is unworthy to approach it. Treat him gently; this youthful scepticism is a painful malady, believe me."

"Forgive me, Henry!—Henry!—Come to Naldo quickly. I have not told you before, fearing to give you pain; but I am sure he has not many days to live."

Mr. Hastings started up. They looked at each other, and the wife threw herself into her husband's arms. "God's will be done!" he said softly. "I had not thought of this!"

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Within ten days from that time little Reginald Hastings lay a corpse in his mother's arms. Hers was a deep, mute grief—as her love had been. Like that, it wore away her vital power. When she had seen the features of her darling assume a smiling expression, such as they had never worn in life, she allowed them to take away the body from her lap, and murmured these words:—"His spirit is with God *at last!*" and then sank back insensible.

She was restored to consciousness but never again to health. Her grief for the loss of Reginald bowed her to the earth. She seemed to carry in her heart the weight of all his earthly sufferings—she could not forget them, nor could she forget how little power she had possessed to alleviate them. All her steady religious principle could not enable her to cast off this burden, and it broke her heart. I have heard my Aunt Margaret say that she never knew any one but her own mother who really died of that often-talked-of disease—a broken heart. My grandmother's undemonstrative, reserved nature had effectually concealed from every one but her husband the fact that her deformed boy was dearer to her than any earthly thing. And every one else was extremely surprised to find that she died of grief for his loss six months afterwards—every one except their daughter Margaret, who could half interpret her mother's grief by her own.

When she was dead (but not till then) the poor girl knew that it was Naldo's life and death that had blanched her mother's cheek, dimmed her eye, slackened her step, subdued her voice, made her indifferent to most things, and finally laid her in Carleton churchyard.

Naldo and their mother gone! In the short space of six months! Here was a black cloud of sorrow enveloping the Hastings family, and hanging over the fair land of youth that was spread out before Margaret. More clouds were gathering, and ere long all the sky became dark. Youth is not a season of sunshine to all. Often the young know no sunshine but that which comes from their own bright spirits. This was the case with my dear aunt. Subsequent griefs may seem far

more important than those recounted in this chapter and the last, but these *first* griefs made an indelible impression on her mind.

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## CHAPTER VII.

## SUNNY BANK.

"God made the country, and man made the town."

COWPER.

THERE is a moderate-sized house with a large garden to which I must now conduct the reader. I said *there is*, but I should have said *there was*, for the place that knew it knows it no more. It has been swallowed up by the westward flowing tide of London; and new villas and crescents have sprung up where, forty years since, this well-cared-for homestead delighted its owner's eyes. It was a sweet place—an English gentleman's home and hobby. It was sheltered from curious eyes and cold winds, and was enclosed on all sides but one, which was exposed to the south-western sun, and whence a prospect worth looking at was to be seen. This little domain contained about five acres of fertile ground, and was tastefully laid out in lawn, shrubbery, paddock, flower and kitchen garden. The house had nothing of the appearance of a modern suburban villa. Still it was suburban,—even in the year 18—, for it was at Brompton;—lying between the present Kensington and Brompton roads; and it might, perhaps, be called a *villa*, since it was too large for a cottage of gentility, containing fourteen rooms, besides stabling and other offices. As these offices included a dairy, a cow-house, a pig-sty, and a poultry-yard, the place had a slight tendency to be a farm. But this tendency only improved the commissariat department within doors, and bated not a jot of the refinement and beauty without. This place was Sunny Bank, the property of Miss Hastings, my great-aunt, or, as she was called sometimes, Dr. Ward's Miss Hastings. It had been purchased by her father, and he had made it what it was. After his death and that of

her mother, Miss Hastings would not leave the place, but was careful to keep it in the state in which her father kept it.

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It was a quarter past seven o'clock, a.m., on a beautiful February morning, and the newly-risen sun had sent an army of golden beams to light up the south-east side of Sunny Bank in a style of uncommon brilliancy.

"What a blessed morning! Almost like summer, Joseph," said Audrey, the housekeeper, as she passed round the front of the house hurriedly on her way to the cow-house. "I am rather late this morning. How pretty your snowdrops look!"

"Good morning, Mistress Audrey! You are looking as bright as the morning, though you did sit up till such an unchristian hour last night."

"Well, it *was* late, but my mistress and her niece and nephew seemed to have a great deal to say, and they kept on talk, talk, talk. Mistress quite forgot I was sitting up. But I'd sit up night after night for her, if she had always got some one to talk to in that free and hearty way. For though Miss Margaret is but a slip of a girl, and very dull and sad-like just now, poor child—you know it's *her* mother mistress put on mourning for about a month back——"

"Yes, yes! Mr. Hastings' wife, down at the Rectory at Carleton. I know."

"Well, though she's cast down a bit just now, yet I hear she's uncommon lively in a general way, and full of fun. It will do us good to see a young thing about the place. We are all growing old here, I declare, Joseph! It's very silly. I wish we sprang up fresh again every year like your snowdrops!"

Joseph looked a little astonished, and was anxious to explain *why* her wish could not be gratified. "You see, Audrey, we ain't in the nature of bulbs and annuals—we are perennials. But the spring takes an effect on *us*, you know. It's my belief that it's the turn of the year that's done the good to

Master Arundel, and made him like other folks again. It was just the sap mounting up into his brain and making it alive. I hope he's going on well in his father's grand London house. It ain't as good for him as our place, I'm thinking. Lor, Audrey! I'm fain to sing for joy, like the birds, on such a morning. Surely this is a beautiful world! One would be loth to leave it. Well, well! I do miss him every day about the garden. Not that he ever took notice of the flower-beds much. It was the shrubbery, and the paddock, and the splashing water that he cared for. But I'd got used to see him wandering about, taking no notice of anybody, and looking as if he had got the most beautiful things before his eyes, only he couldn't see 'em clear. But now he's sensible again he looks like other folks. He said, 'Good morning, Rosemary!' and gave me a guinea the morning he went away, just like any other young gentleman. And now, I suppose, he will go, and do all sorts of mischief like the rest of them. Perhaps it would have been better for him if he had remained a simpleton and stayed here."

"Lor, Joseph! But I wish he hadn't gone just now; because, now he's quite right again, he would have been a nice companion for Missy Margaret, who is come to stay a long time. We are all too old for her. Young people ought to be with young people."

"So they should, Audrey—so they should. But folks need not leave off being young unless they like. What should make me old?"

"Rheumatism," replied Audrey, laughing. "But, for all that, you are a young-hearted old chap. Take care of yourself, and maybe I'll have you for my second."

"Ah—I don't like *that* bargain. Take me for your first, Audrey. You'd better."

"No, no. I can't do that," said Audrey, laughing heartily.

"Well, I see you take after your mistress, and mean to die an old maid."

"What time is it now, Joseph?"



He looked up at the sun just as if it had a dial-plate on its face, and replied,

"About half-past seven. But don't go yet, Audrey. I knew you would be late this morning, so I went and milked the cows and turned them out for you; just go to the corner, and you will see them eating as fast as ever they can, at the other end of the paddock."

Audrey moved along the grassy terrace that ran in front of the house, till she came to the corner, whence she could command a view of the upper end of the paddock. "They are there, safe enough," she said to herself. "Well, he's a thoughtful, kind body, bless him! And some day, perhaps—but—What's that?" she exclaimed, as she caught sight of a girlish form in the distance. By the black frock, the large straw hat and black ribbon, and the light, but slow step, she knew who it was—Miss Margaret. "Ah! country young ladies are used to early rising. Well, I must go in and see about the breakfast. I dare say she'll have an appetite after her journey yesterday. She didn't touch a morsel of the nice little supper last night. Mr. James said he must be in town at ten o'clock—didn't he, Joseph?"

"Yes; but you need not run off. They can't want breakfast yet. There is nobody stirring."

"Yes. Missy Margaret is up and out yonder, looking at the waterfall. She'll be down here presently to look at your borders. She's never been here since she can remember, so you must show her what's most worth seeing."

"Then you must stay, Audrey." Audrey laughed, and told him he was as polite as a Frenchman. "One moment, Audrey. What do you object to in me *most*, because I will begin by altering that."

"Altering at *your* age! Why, you're fifty years old! Well, in the first place, I should like to have all your features altered."

"All! Won't one of them do?"

"Not one. Your eyes are too small, your nose too large, your forehead too low, your chin too high——"

"Ah, that's enough. I see you don't love me a bit."

"I've told you so often enough."

"And yet, somehow, Audrey, I love *you* so well that I have been fool enough to fancy you must come to love me in return."

"I can't help that. Good morning, Mr. Rosemary! There comes Miss Margaret. Thank you for milking the cows. You shall have a round of hot toast when you come in to breakfast. I'm always grateful!" And Audrey withdrew, laughing.

The merry, middle-aged loves of Audrey and Joseph Rosemary tended very much to lighten the burden of life within the peaceful precincts of Sunny Bank; and so did some younger loves. Ann, the housemaid, told George, the foot-boy, or *ci-devant* boy, as they watched the couple from the window, that for her part she thought Mrs. Audrey was in the right of it. "Courting-days was a deal better than married life. There was always plenty of love before marriage, and little enough afterwards."

George looked half-loving and half-logical as he replied that, "There was a deal of wisdom in her words, there always was! As a rule, it was quite true that there was more love before than after marriage, and therefore Mistress Audrey and other women were quite right in putting off the wedding-day as long as possible—but she (Ann) had founded an exception with a rule. Was *he* (George) like any other man?—he asked her *that*." Ann was obliged to confess that she did not think he was. "Well, then, I will tell you, Ann. I know women pretty well!"—(he was just twenty-one)—"and I declare that there's no other woman I ever saw like *you*. There now!"

"Lor! what nonsense, George!"

"Pon my honour, now!"

"Well, and what of that?"

"Why this. It follows, of course, that if we are both different from other people, our marriage will be different—doesn't it?"

Ann was not able to raise any objection to this conclusion.

"Then don't you think," said George, "that you might safely give me a little more love before marriage, without any fear of diminishing the stock that is to serve us afterwards. I put it to you now as a reasonable girl, Ann. Could you not, for instance, oblige me with a kiss just now, instead of throwing a duster in my face?—Well, as I *must* have a kiss, and you won't *give* it me,—there is but one way left.—Is there, now?—I appeal to your reason."

"Is that the way you appeal to a young woman's reason, sir?" asked Mistress Audrey, coming into the room just as George was helping himself to the little delicacy he had set his heart upon. Ann flung herself away in some confusion, but George faced Mrs. Audrey boldly.

"Yes, my dear Mrs. Audrey—of course it is. A woman of your experience must know well enough that *that's* the only way of appealing to a woman's reason. It's what scholars call the *argumentum ad feminam*."

"Oh, indeed, Mr. Jackanapes!" said Audrey—with whom George was a great favourite, having been brought into the family by herself when he was only fourteen. "And pray where did you learn *that*, and the Latin for it?"

"Why I learned the truth itself without anybody's help. I discovered it. Didn't I, Ann?"

"Don't be a fool!" said Ann, busily laying the breakfast-cloth to conceal her high admiration of her lover's "blessed impudence."

"Certainly not, my dear. I couldn't if I would, you know. —Then, as the knowledge came by nature, you see I wasn't long in getting the Latin name. I haven't been backwards and forwards to Eton for nothing."

"You don't mean to say that you learned anything about kissing from boys like Lord Merle? Why, he's only a little more than sixteen!" exclaimed Audrey, while Ann held up her hands in astonishment.

George burst into a laugh. "Well, you women are a queer lot!—Why, bless your innocence! What do you suppose

young noblemen and gentlemen go to a public school for?"

"I know," said Audrey, "that some of 'em learn lots of wickedness there; and that it sticks to them ever after—but I did not think such a sweet young gentleman as Lord Merle (bless his handsome face!)—so sorry for his brother as he always seemed when he came here, for I've seen the tears run down his face as he looked at him—I can't bear to think that he's quite corrupted like young — and — and — God help his poor mother! But she's dying they say—so it's to be hoped she knows nothing of his viciousness—gambling and drinking, too, I dare say. Why, perhaps you'll say the same things of Mr. James Hastings, and he in the house now! Oh, George, George!"

"Get along with you!" said Ann, indignantly. "I hate you! You must be very wicked yourself to know of so much wickedness in others!"

"And you a mere boy, too!" said Audrey, looking quite disconsolate.

"Why, what *have* I done? Come here, both of you.—No.—I *will* make you hear me;" and the young man threw an arm round each of them. "Now listen to me, both of you," he said, turning his good-looking, clever, and perfectly honest face first to one and then to the other, in the course of his harangue. "Did I say any harm of Mr. James, or of Lord Merle?"

"You said they taught you *that* argument stuff," said Ann, flashing her black eyes up into his face.

"I didn't. I said *you* taught it me. But listen now. Don't you either of you take it into your heads that Lord Merle is the least bit of a scamp—for he isn't, though I have seen him kiss a girl or two; and when Mr. James said something to him about its being very foolish, he said, in his lively way, that it was a new form of logic he was learning—it was the *argumentum ad fœminam*. But don't you think that he's got any real *vice* in him. Pooh! pooh! A man, or a boy either, may snatch a kiss once in a way, without being a rogue or a

profligate. The girls Lord Merle kissed were quite ready to kiss him."

"The impudent things!" exclaimed the two virtuous listeners.

"No, no; they weren't that either, Mrs. Audrey. They were respectable country lasses, who saw some fun, and no harm, in a kiss. They were not a bit more impudent than you two, who will see no harm in making matters up with me at this precise moment by an *argumentum ad feminam*!" So saying he kissed a cheek of each with the utmost assurance.

"'Pon my word, Mr. George Green!" exclaimed Audrey, trying to be angry, but being unable to suppress a laugh. "It's well Lord Merle has begged that place at Carleton for you from the earl. We couldn't bear you here much longer; you're a deal too clever for us. The Carleton folks won't know you. Your father hasn't had any game to preserve half as cunning or as wild as you. I'd have nothing to do with him, Ann, if I were you! But we mustn't stand fooling here any longer. Run into the kitchen and see that the urn is ready, there's a good fellow! I'm coming to broil the ham."

"I say, Ann, my girl," said Audrey, when he was gone, "George is a good fellow, every inch of him; but don't you let him appeal to your reason very often. That cloth is all awry."

"Never fear, Mistress Audrey! I'm a little flurried like this morning, because the young gentleman, Mr. James, gave George a note from the bailiff down at Carleton Park, saying how my Lord Carleton had ordered that George was to be the new gate-keeper; that the lodge was ready for him to move into as soon as he liked; and that he was to have fifty pounds a year, besides house and garden, and firewood—and—and——"

"And George wants you to marry him directly, eh?"

"Yes;—and I said I would, come next May—if so be as you was suited with a person in my place. I wouldn't put you or mistress to an ill-conveniencey."

"I know that, child," said Audrey, forgetting her business again, and putting her hand on the girl's shoulder. "Well, well! I trust it may be for the best. Try your luck, Ann, try your luck; we're not all lucky alike. Marriage is a lottery. He's a good youth, and you are a good girl. So you are going to live at Carleton! You'll be monstrous dull, Ann. I never was there—though I've heard of few other places all my life."

"You must come and see George and me," said Ann, as if she really meant it.

"God forbid!" ejaculated Audrey. Then, trying to make Ann forget the earnest tone of these two words, she began to open closets and take out marmalades and cakes for the breakfast. Mr. James's foot was heard on the stairs, and Miss Hastings would be down at half-past eight, so that there was no more time for talk among the servants just then.

When James Hastings stepped through the front porch on to the terrace, he found his sister Margaret standing near Joseph Rosemary, watching the masterly way in which he was training a great honeysuckle that mantled a corner of the house. The bright, fresh morning had communicated some of its virtue to Margaret's young heart. She sprang forward to meet her brother.

"Oh, James!—what a dear, sweet place this is! And what a delightful, stupid old fellow Joseph is! He reminds me of Cuthbert, because he is so very much unlike him," she added, in a whisper. "'A good old man, but he will be talking.'"

"Oh, you've found out his weak point, have you? Good morning, Joseph. A fine morning!—a remarkably fine morning for the worms and the early birds, Joseph!"

"Why, yes, Mr. James; I don't see as anything has much reason to find fault with this morning. So, you're not going to stay with us, sir; I'm sorry for it. Our air is very good. You'll be poisoned with the smoke."

"Oh, I shall come down here every Saturday, and spend Sunday."

"And so, sir, you ain't to be a clergyman after all. Well,

please God, you'll not be the worse man of business for having learned a little of parsoning."

"I hope not, Joseph. There's a ring at the gate." And away trotted Joseph to open it. "Come, Maggie; I want you to take a turn in the shrubbery with me before breakfast."

Joseph took in a letter handed him by a man in the Carleton livery, who afterwards stayed to have a slight chat with him. When the chat was over, Joseph carried the letter to the kitchen, and gave it to Ann, who was the first person he came across. "For mistress," he said; and then hurried back to his work, with his head full of the news the messenger had communicated. "Poor Lady Carleton! Quite young, too!—not forty! But it may be all a false alarm. Doctors *must* make a fuss about every trifle that is the matter with rich and great folks, or how could they ride in their carriages? Now, I'm thinking, if they'd let her come here and be quiet, *our* air and *our* mistress would set her up again. Anyhow, it's a fine thing to think that Mr. Arundel is quite right again! Won't leave his mother! Barnes says. And she can't bear to have him out of her sight. Poor thing—poor thing! Here's mistress. I suppose she's got the note. Good morning, ma'am! Mr. James and the young lady are up in the shrubbery. Ah! you're looking at the snowdrops, ma'am," he added, rubbing his hands with pleasure; "they are fine! They never look so well as they do in the early morning. And see, the new crocuses are coming up very nicely, ma'am."

"Yes, Joseph; everything here looks well."

"She knows something about a garden. It's a pleasure to work for her!" said the old man, to himself, as she passed on. He was very happy thinking over his work for the coming month, and forgetting everything unpleasant, except the fear of blight or frost, until George came to summon him to breakfast.

When James had departed to his daily occupation at a bank in London, young Margaret was left alone with her somewhat

formidable aunt. They walked about the garden, which the young girl admired very much,—they talked of family matters,—of James's prospects—of Sophia's admirers—of Margaret's own studies. But they did not speak of the subject nearest to Maggie's heart just then—her aunt's late inmate, Arundel Raby, and his mother. She was about to ask *when* her aunt would take her to see Lady Carleton, when some morning visitors arrived.

After the visitors were gone, Miss Hastings told Margaret she must amuse herself till dinner-time, as she was obliged to go out alone. Margaret strolled about the garden and the apartments, thinking a good deal of this dignified and severe but kind aunt. She had heard of her benevolence and of her unusual studies and occupations. Finding the door of the small library open, she went in to examine it. To her surprise it was not at all pretty—not even comfortable, she thought,—as every other room in the house was, except her aunt's bedroom. There and in this little library a severe economy, not to say privation, reigned. They were like what Margaret imagined the cell and study of a monk would be. The dormitory was uncarpeted—the bedstead was uncurtained—instead of a down-bed Miss Hastings slept on a mattress. Her toilette was of the simplest kind—if I except the washing apparatus, which was extensive; giving rise to Audrey's saying, that "Miss Hastings would kill herself with cold water," for in those days the vulgar mind in England was not familiar with the idea of bathing. As to *garde-robes*, *armoires*, and female necessities of that kind, Miss Hastings troubled herself little about them. One large old-fashioned chest of drawers contained all her apparel. Her morning-dress was of striped gingham, and her dinner-dress of black silk or satin, with a kerchief of white lace.

The library was completely lined with books, the greater part collected by her father, the rest by Miss Hastings herself. Of these last the largest portion consisted of medical books which treated of diseases of the brain. The only articles of furniture in the library were a large table, on



which lay a desk, flanked by piles of books; a side-table, on which lay several rolls—maps Margaret supposed them to be,—and two chairs, one a cushioned *Voltaire*, which stood by the fire-place for the use of Dr. Ward, the only visitor who was allowed to step into Miss Hastings' *sanctum*; and the other a common straight-backed seat, which stood by the table.

Margaret was much struck by the appearance of this room. It looked bare and simple, and, in spite of the brightly-blazing fire, it was cold. She wondered much that there were no flowers, no pictures, for she knew that her aunt had great taste. She had seen and admired its display in the drawing and breakfast-rooms and in the garden. Why did she banish all beauty from her own study? "Oh," thought she, "if I had this library for my own, I would make it look so pretty. I should not be able to look at my book for looking at the beautiful things. Ah, how very wise my aunt is! She keeps all temptation out of her way when she is here. I suppose I may unroll these things, and see what they are!"

She accordingly began to unroll one of the supposed maps, and found it to be one of a country quite unknown to her. It was a drawing of a magnified section of the anterior portion of the brain. It was coloured to imitate nature. Margaret shrank back, and allowed the large sheet to roll up of itself again. She took another and began to unroll it, but no sooner caught the profile of "*un crétin de la Suisse*" than she let it drop from her hand. Picking it up hastily, she threw it on the table and tried to examine another. This time her courage was roused. "I *will* look at this one!" and she did look at it. She looked at it long, very long, and the tears streamed down her cheeks as she murmured, "How like!"

It was a crayon portrait of Arundel Raby, taken in the first period of his late mental derangement. It is like the face of the Belvidere Apollo,—like what it would be if you could deprive it of all its intelligence and its beautiful scorn, giving it instead an expression of melancholy dejection. My aunt had seen no copy of the Apollo in those days, nor any other

form of pre-eminent youthful beauty with which to compare her friend, except his brother.

Presently she saw some writing in pencil along the margin of the drawing, and was about to read it, when she paused, rolled up the drawing and laid it down again. She went on thinking to herself:

"Perhaps I ought not even to look at these things; I did not ask leave. I will not read that writing, though it must concern Arundel, and I would give a great deal to know all about his illness, and how my aunt cured him; for papa says she *did* cure him. If she would tell me a little about how to manage people who have attacks of insanity like Arundel! I will ask her. Papa says all learned people are fond of talking about their studies. I suppose my aunt is as learned as a physician. But I cannot quite understand how she can take a pleasure, as James says she does, in going to see all sorts of mad people. To go to see some one she loved if he were mad—even to have him in her house as she did Arundel—that I can understand. I think I could bear to see those I love suffer in *that* way—worse than poor Naldo's!—but strangers! Aunt must be a much better Christian than most people. 'If ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?' It is those who are despised and trodden down of men that she cares for."

She approached the table again. "I *may* look at the books, I suppose. What is this new one with the handsome binding? Oh, a presentation copy! '*A Mademoiselle Hastings, avec les sentiments distingués de l'Auteur.*' Oh, my aunt knows French authors, does she? If it were a book of fairy tales, now! Let me see:—'*Traité Médico-Philosophique sur l'Aliénation Mentale, par Ph. Pinel, Médecin consultant de sa Majesté l'Empereur et Roi,*' etc., etc. Humph!" She took up another book—"An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Mental Derangement." Another—"Annals of Insanity, Lunacy, or Madness." Then another—"Treatise on the Real Cause of Insanity—Harper." All about insanity. Let me look at the shelves. '*Über Melancholie,*' that's German!

'Della Pazzia in generale ed in spezie,' Italian!! Oh, auntie, auntie! how did you ever find time to learn all these languages? '*Observations, par M. Pussin, sur les Fous de Bicêtre.*' Where is Bicêtre, I wonder! 'Medical Journal.' What a number of volumes. What's this? 'Observations on Insanity, by John Haslam.' Oh, dear! oh dear!" She sat down on her aunt's chair before the desk, and mused.

"Insanity, nothing but insanity. '*Fous!*' '*Insensés!*' '*Aliénés!*' To look at all those books one would think half the world was insane. James says that there are a great many more people of unsound mind than I suppose. What a dreadful thing! But dear Arundel was not mad. He never hurt anybody, was never violent. I wonder whether there are many kinds of madness, some that can be cured. Oh yes, learned physicians would not go on writing so many books about a disease they know they cannot cure. Aunt *has* cured, or helped Dr. Ward to cure, insane people. How happy it must make her! If I had any one I loved dearly, dearly, and he was to go raving mad, what should I feel towards any one who would cure him? But I talk about madness; I never saw a mad person." And she shuddered. "I don't think I could bear to see any one really mad. Even now it makes me cold all over when I think of Arundel as I saw him that evening. But he surely was not what is called mad. Yet, how dreadful it was to see *him* look, as if he had no understanding. James says he is cleverer than ever now, and gayer than he used to be. I shall see him soon!"

Her thoughts were wandering away to a pleasant subject, when her eye fell on the open page before her, where she read these words—"'*Aliénation originaire ou héréditaire.*' I should like to know something about this terrible disease, and yet it frightens me." Her hand trembled so that she could scarcely turn over the leaves. As she was forcing her mind to the comprehension of some sentence in the book, her aunt entered.

When she saw how Margaret was employed, she put her

hand over the open page, and said, "My dear child, never open any books or papers you may chance to see here. There are plenty of books in the drawing-room that will instruct and amuse you. These books are not fit for you. Give me your promise that you will not look into any of them."

Margaret promised, for there was a tone of command in her aunt's voice which she could not resist, and the crowd of questions retreated from her lips. She certainly was a little afraid of her aunt.

Dinner and tea-time passed, and Margaret, though not cheerful, was beguiled by the novelty of all about her, and felt none of the melancholy which had oppressed her ever since her mother's death. She felt it slightly in the evening when, seated in Dr. Ward's chair, in the study, she watched her grave aunt steadily reading the forbidden Pinel. The poor girl's thoughts wandered away home; she leaned back and closed her eyes, the better to call up before her a picture of the drawing-room at the rectory, as it would be at that moment. She knew where her papa would be sitting, and what book he would be reading aloud, in order to make the motherless group a little gayer by his presence. She could see Sophia, and Tom, and Clara; and Henry, she fancied, would be with them.

Just as she was settling in her own mind what Henry would be doing, a loud ring at the gate-bell was heard. It startled both aunt and niece. The former pushed back her book, and remained looking towards the door, with some anxiety depicted in her face. Margaret sat up and looked at the door too.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

## LOVE AND DEATH.

"Yet in these ears till hearing dies,  
One set slow bell will seem to toll  
The passing of the sweetest soul  
That ever looked from human eyes,"

*In Memoriam.*

A CARRIAGE was heard winding slowly along the little drive from the gate to the house, and there was some confusion among the servants at this unusually late visit. Within a minute after the carriage drew up at the porch, a man's step, rapid and somewhat heavy, was heard approaching the door of the study, which was thrown open by Audrey, and the visitor walked in before she could announce him. As the room was ill-lighted by the single reading-lamp which stood on the table beside Miss Hastings, and which dazzled her eyes as she looked up, she could not, at first, discern his face. Her niece, who was lost in shadow, and who remained unperceived by the new comer for some minutes, knew him in a moment, notwithstanding a certain strange almost stern look, which was not habitual to him. It was Lord Carleton. He stood looking at Miss Hastings till she recognised him. As soon as she did so, she became paler than usual, and rising slowly, advanced a step.

"What is it brings you here?" she inquired in a gentle voice. "Is Arundel——"

"No. Not Arundel. My wife."

"Ah! Is she worse?"

"You had my note this morning?"

"A note from you? I have not received it."

"Strange! It was delivered to one of your servants. I ought to have been sure that it never reached your hands!—I wrote at Caroline's request, soon after Dr. Ward's announcement, early this morning, that within thirty hours she would be no more. She has something to communicate to you before——"

For the first time his voice faltered a little.

"Can it be possible! Is she so much changed since I last saw her three days ago?"

"There is little perceptible change in her. You will come?—I cannot wait. Nothing but her earnest entreaty could have induced me to leave her. She believes that you would not refuse if I came myself. We were sorely puzzled that you neither came nor replied to my note."

"In one moment I shall be ready. Wait here." And she left the room.

Lord Carleton began to pace to and fro, with his eyes bent on the floor. He looked sterner than ever; but Maggie was brave when moved by affection; she would have faced fifty stern pre-occupied men to gain her object now. She rose from the great chair, stood before him, and looking steadily into his face, said,—

"May I go with you and my aunt? I love Lady Carleton. She will not be able to see me—I know *that*. Only let me go to the house! I will be still—keep out of everybody's way! Only let me be near her!"—And she clasped her hands in earnest supplication.

The fixed severity of Lord Carleton's face relaxed. He laid his hand on her head gently. "My good little girl, I know that you love her, and that she loves you. She spoke of you to-day,—said she wished to see you. But you will hereafter be *obliged*, perhaps, to see those you love die. It is very painful. You had better remain here."

"You forget, my lord. It is but two months since I saw my own mother die—and before that, Naldo. I can bear death. Do not think I am too young. Let me see dear Lady Carleton once more!"

"As you please, my child. Ask your aunt," he replied, relapsing into his former manner, as Miss Hastings returned, wrapped in a large cloak. "May your niece come with us? Caroline will like to see her for a moment. She is attached to the child."

Miss Hastings looked in Margaret's face, and then said.

"Yes, my dear, you may come with us. You will find a wrapper as we go through the hall. I am quite ready."

Without the interchange of another word, they all three entered the carriage, and the silence was not broken during the time they were being driven rapidly along the road from Brompton to St. James's Square; a dark and dismal road in those days—so dark that they scarcely caught sight of each other once during the transit.

Miss Hastings and Lord Carleton reclined in opposite corners. It was more than twenty years ago—almost five-and-twenty, since they were last in a carriage together. On that occasion they had passed over this very same ground. They were returning then from a first visit—a visit of examination and approval—to Sunny Bank, after the completion of the purchase by old Mr. Hastings. Sorrow had not touched Miss Hastings then; they were both full of hope then; they were in the golden prime of life, dreaming together that sweetest, fairest dream of young love;—a dream in which no one ever dreams that he is dreaming—a dream which seems as everlasting as the heavens, and as impossible to be worn out by sorrow and change;—the only dream of this earth which, when we are once fully, sadly, soberly awake from it, we know will never, never come again!—Oh, youth! oh, love! oh, change!

"Oh, last regret! regret can die!"

Had any one recounted to the boy and girl of that bygone spring day—the circumstances under which they would next traverse that road together, they would have said, "It is impossible! We cease to be all in all to each other?—We could not live if it were so!"

As they sat now—no more hand in hand—each with closed eyes, absorbed in the contemplation of the sad present, changed in so much of their being from what they once were—not willing, even had they been able, to be to each other now what they would once have deemed it worse than death *not* to be; each with a vague secret sense of disap-

pointment (just or unjust) against the other—suddenly, and at the same moment, the recollection of that distant day recurred to both of them. The commonest circumstance—merely the momentary check of the carriage at the old turnpike in Knightsbridge—brought the same thought, flashing like lightning through each mind—"Does she remember that day?"—"Does he remember?"

At length the carriage stopped at Raby House. Silent, rapid, and obsequious, the powdered porters threw open the doors, and Maggie and her aunt stood in the splendid vestibule. A preternatural stillness reigned—yet there were groups of servants, who whispered with grave faces, and seemed to be eagerly expecting some intelligence. Lord Carleton beckoned to one, and whispered some words, as he conducted his companions past the others, who were now hushed into silence, and stood back respectfully on either hand. Miss Hastings caught these words in reply:

"No change, my lord. Dr. Ward desired me to tell you that he was compelled to go away for an hour or two. He will return as soon as he can."

Young Margaret followed her aunt and Lord Carleton up the staircase, where classic beauty smiled a perpetual calm, in marble. Instead of being attracted, as she would have been at another time by those glorious statues, she shrank from gazing on them, and said to herself, "They should be veiled in time of mourning." It was a natural thought! These lovely unsympathetic faces, smiling calmly in godlike serenity, aggravate the burden of the mourner. They should not be allowed to crush the sufferers who pass and repass before them with their proud indifference, their sweet heathen superiority to all human sorrow. Only the Niobe, the Gladiator, the Clytie, and those sculptured forms that breathe out sorrow with their beauty—of which we think to ourselves—

"How beautiful! If sorrow had not made  
Sorrow more beautiful than beauty's self!"

Only such statues should remain uncovered in the house



while the Angel of Death hovers over it. Thus would Margaret have followed out her thought had she been older.

Miss Price, weeping, and somewhat bent with years, met them at the top of the staircase.

"I will leave you now!" whispered Lord Carleton to Miss Hastings, and walked rapidly forward.

"Why did you not come before?" asked Miss Price, as they followed him slowly.

"A servant neglected to give me the note."

"She wished to see you before she saw her lawyer to-day. She has some control of the North Ashurst estates—though they are entailed on the second son. I believe there is a difference of opinion between her and the lawyer—between her and Lord Carleton. She remains firm. It concerns Arundel, of course. I wish she had not such things to trouble her at this time!"

"She cannot want to consult me about this. I know nothing of it. It must be about Arundel's health. How are he and his brother?"

"Lord Merle is quite ill with grief. Poor young thing! But it is wonderful to see Arundel so calm and self-possessed. He waits on his mother, writes for her, reads to her,—will not leave her. When she is attacked by sharp pains, as she was just now when you arrived, the boy soothes her with music, which seems to produce a better effect than any medicine. How he can get steadiness of hand and voice to play and sing in such circumstances, is marvellous! Music has more influence upon them both than upon any persons I ever saw. Dr. Ward approves of it, and says that physicians would often find music of more use in nervous disorders than half the pharmacopœia."

Miss Price was growing old, and was rather more profuse in words, when under excitement, than she had been formerly.

"Hark!" exclaimed Miss Hastings. "That is Arundel singing now. She is still in pain, then."

A door in the distance seemed to open for a minute, and

then to close again, letting out a melodious wave of sound, which swelled forward towards them, and then receded, and was swallowed up again in silence. Maggie recognised the dear familiar music—"I know that my Redeemer liveth."

They opened a room; it was so spacious and lofty, that the candelabras on the table near the fire only lighted a small portion of it which was partially enclosed by an Indian screen—the rest was a sort of "palpable obscure," in which large, massy pieces of furniture and draped windows loomed like spectral insubstantial forms; it had an inexpressibly melancholy aspect, and the visitors turned their eyes from the gloom, and drew near to the fire.

"You must be cold," said the old lady. "The servants forget to attend to the fires; they forget everything now!"—and she endeavoured to mend the fire.

Miss Hastings took the heavy poker from her feeble hand, and produced a blaze. This blaze revealed a sofa, at a little distance, on which some one was sleeping.

"It is poor Frank," said Miss Price. "He is quite overwhelmed with the violence of his grief."

While she was looking at him, his brother came into the room.

Maggie had not seen Arundel since that memorable evening in the old room at Carleton, which she could not bear to recall.

He was a slender youth, tall for his age, and less awkward than growing boys generally are. He was naturally paler and less handsome than his brother; and although all trace of mental disease was gone from his countenance, there was an habitual melancholy in the expression—a certain stillness, which gave the face the effect of being seen in shadow. This effect was increased by the colour of the complexion, which was a pale olive. A painter would say it had a true Italian tone—it was what Audrey called "dreadful sallow." The boy's step, like every outward characteristic, had changed since his complete recovery. It was now light, firm, decided;—there was no more inert dragging of the limbs, as if all

motion were hateful; no fitful, vague gliding anywhither, without care or intention in moving; no stealthy stepping, so that the footfall could not be heard. All such indications of insanity in gait and bearing were gone. He moved, looked, spoke no more, either like a disembodied spirit, or like the mere form and substance of humanity without its true essence. But if Arundel was unlike the insane youth she had seen last summer, Maggie thought he was equally unlike the companion and protector of her childish days, whose image she so enthusiastically revered. She could scarcely believe it was her old friend who now approached her aunt, and said, in a set measured tone, as if he were repeating a lesson,—

“Dear Miss Hastings, my mother has sent me to take you to her. Can you come now?”

“Oh, how he is changed!” she thought; “he’s grown into a man.” And the affectionate girl felt a severe pang. It was not a selfish pang; the bitterness lay in the fact that her idol, her model, her beloved friend, *was changed*—not that he was changed to *her*.

As he was about to leave the room, Arundel saw Maggie. A new expression, something like a gleam of pleasure, came over his face; and he was about to go back and speak to her, but her eyes were bent on the ground, and Miss Hastings was waiting for him to open the door. As he followed that lady out of the room, he cast another glance back at Maggie; she was looking at him, and her eyes were full of tears.

Miss Price and Margaret then sat down in silence to await Miss Hastings’ return. Maggie was heartily glad Miss Price did not ask her any questions. She sat trying to arrange her thoughts—the many new thoughts that had been crowding in on her mind during the last twenty-four hours. She communed with herself in this manner:

“Is this the beginning of real life? James says I have hitherto led the thoughtless life of a child, and the ideal life of a dreamer. Everything has been new to me since I left home. New, strange, and yet as if it all concerned me intimately. Sunny Bank, my aunt, Lord Carleton, Lady Carleton,

this grand house, Arundel—they all belong to me, and I belong to them; and they are all unhappy, and I am so weak and ignorant and young. I cannot help them. But in all places and circumstances there is a good and gracious Father above me, who sees and hears.”

While Margaret was half fearfully looking round her, after taking the first steps into life, elsewhere, beneath that roof, another unselfish loving soul was about to take the first step into another state of being. The once fair Countess of Carleton was passing rapidly away from the joy and sorrows—the deep affections and the gnawing cares—of this mortal life.

She was alone with Miss Hastings, who sat beside the bed, and bent forward to catch her faint though earnest tones, which seemed to grow stronger as their conversation proceeded.

“Give me your hand,” she said, “So!—Now we shall understand each other better;” and a faint smile lighted up her emaciated features. “Do you remember telling me once—long ago, when we first knew each other, that you and I ‘could only be friends in adversity?’ You were right; but it was my fault that it was so. I should have been jealous of you—you feared that.”

“Nay,” said Miss Hastings. “I feared that I might become envious of your happier lot.”

“Does a pure love ever die?” asked Lady Carleton.

“Yes; in the same way that a pure man dies. It passes into another and a higher stage of its development. It gets rid of its earthly trammels.”

“You will think me unfit to die. I still love those earthly trammels, as you call them, better than the promises of heavenly freedom: husband and children are dearer than ever to my heart!”—and the sweet face became agonised for a moment. “I am very rebellious. I cannot say, ‘Thy will be done.’ My own human will struggles desperately at times with this coming death. I do not fear the future for myself. No! I have a calm assurance of God’s everlasting love. I can trust *myself* easily to Him; but with strange human

inconsistency, I do not trust implicitly to Him all the interests of those I love."

"But all appears well now, dear Lady Carleton. Your husband and children should cause you no uneasiness," said Miss Hastings.

"Listen to me, and judge!—I speak out. This is no time to soften truth. My husband's character is not unknown to you. He is loving—he is jealous—he is steady even to obstinacy—he is ambitious, and proud of his family. These qualities have strengthened with years. He loves me and Frank!—Arundel——" here she paused, and her lips quivered. "He would be kind and good to him—but he does not understand—he does not love my poor afflicted boy!—does not build hopes on *him*! During Arundel's last attack he got the notion that he will never be fit for the business of the world. That, in short, he ought to be kept out of society, and that my large property, which is entailed on him, should revert to his brother, who will, of course, supply Arundel with all that is necessary for a *lunatic*."

"Good God!" exclaimed Miss Hastings. "Treat Arundel as a lunatic! This is grossly unjust, and comes from false pride in the earl. Let him wait a few years, and see whether Arundel is a son of whom a father need be ashamed. Treat him as a confirmed lunatic! It would be as just to deprive Lord Carleton himself of his property, and his position, and duties in the world, on the score of insanity! If I mistake not, your son Arundel will be of more utility to his country than the generality of large landed proprietors. He is precisely one of those to whom abundant wealth should be given, for he is born to rule, and knows it; and unless his manhood belie his boyhood, he will never use his power for a selfish or narrow purpose. He is tremblingly alive to the sufferings—to what *he* calls the social and political wrongs of the lower classes. It was the concentration of his thoughts and feelings on this one subject, not the severity of his school labours at Eton, that unsettled his reason for a time. M. de Merville says that his lessons were mere pastime to

him, and that while other boys took credit to themselves for construing a Greek play, Arundel was trying the strength of his half-developed intellect against the questions which occupy the great men of all countries. He visited the labouring poor, the mechanics, the tradespeople in and about Windsor and Eton; and M. de Merville believed that he did so for the sake of acquiring a little more manual skill in certain handicrafts, as Lord Carleton had always encouraged him and his brother to do. His motives were very different; he was conversing with them about political grievances. Again, M. de Merville's collection of the newest works in this effervescent French philosophy was accessible to Arundel—books, in a great measure, supporting the views of his arch-instructor, Rousseau, as set forth in '*Le Contrat Social*.'

"The temporary slumber of the moral and intellectual nature which succeeded was a blessing, and not a misfortune, my dear Lady Carleton! My fixed opinion is, that Arundel will owe a clear head and a steady will in manhood to his late salutary repose of mind. Talk with him now, and you will see that he has forgotten nothing of what he knew before. He is as if he had awaked, refreshed and invigorated by a long sleep, after unnatural exertion of the whole nature. He is sane now, and Dr. Ward believes that he will continue so, unless adverse circumstances intervene."

"What would you call adverse circumstances?"

"Strong and violent opposition to his will, his affections, his intellectual progress."

Lady Carleton sighed deeply. "You have told me more than I knew of my own child!—I believe with you that Arundel will continue sane, and that he ought to have the whole and sole control of his property when he comes of age. His father says 'No.' He looks upon Arundel's devotion to what he calls 'the cause of the people' as a species of insanity. He is irritated at the fire and obstinacy of the boy in their talks. I cannot mediate, because I do not understand; but Arundel seems to me to hold some very

strange doctrines. He may adhere to these, and, in accordance with them, would dissipate the property which he inherits. Still, if I were to tie it up, so that he cannot carry out any of the plans which he has at heart——”

“In that case,” interrupted Miss Hastings, “you would probably help to make him an incurable maniac. He has an active and a nobly-ambitious nature; shut him out from the means of free, extensive action, and it will languish—just as his physical frame would if you confined him for life in a dungeon. He has been brought up with the idea that he would be one day a great landed proprietor. He has never been taught to think of himself as a younger brother, much less as one to be held in perpetual pupilage. Let him have the charge of his own property, until he shows, unmistakably, that he is not a responsible moral agent. With his superior intelligence, his pride, his eagerness to do good, it would be a cruel blow to find himself cast into bonds because he was afflicted in his youth with a melancholy malady. It is the surest way of bringing back and confirming that malady.”

“I feel that what you say is true,” said the countess. “I will, therefore, do all that lays in my power to preserve Arundel’s rights as a member of society. At one-and-twenty he shall inherit the North Ashurst property.”

“Perhaps Lord Carleton should exercise some control——”

“No!”—interrupted the agitated mother. “There it is! Frederick is predisposed to judge severely of Arundel. He believes, too, that he is, and will be, a mere visionary, if not a madman; and that the truest kindness would be to take away the management of this property from him, and give him a moderate income.”

“Lord Carleton is a Cabinet Minister. He is five-and-forty, and not likely to take new views. Will he be disposed to tolerate the new philosophy, the democratic notions of his own son? He knows that his family have for several generations been liable to diseases of the brain, and having feared all his life that Arundel *would* be incurably insane, he will

be inclined to conclude that he is so. It is difficult for him to do otherwise. You must, in justice to your son, give your husband no control over this property. Be sure of this, that if Arundel finds himself becoming a victim to this fearful hereditary disease (and he is almost certain to be conscious of any change of the kind), he will himself yield up the property to those better qualified to fulfil its duties."

"This conversation has confirmed me in the line of conduct I have adopted this morning. I have spoken to Arundel on the subject. The lawyers will receive my final orders in an hour. God bless you, dear Miss Hastings! I feel assured, from this conversation, that while *you* live, my boy will not want a friend who understands him, and to whom he may speak freely—who will even mediate, if necessary, between him and his father. God bless you! I should have loved you had I allowed myself to become a frequent visitor in that sweet home of yours, where my boy found peace and joy and reason!—But—I am not like you—even now I cannot forget that I have enjoyed all my life the happiness that should have been yours!—and though you may forgive me, I cannot quite forgive you. We never forgive those we have injured, you know!" And again there was an effort to smile. "Ring for them to come back, now; I cannot spare them longer!—This conversation seems to have done me good, and I really feel much revived. Perhaps, after all, this may be a false alarm.—I am decidedly better! Give me a little of that wine."

As the thin hand held the glass to the pale lips, Lord Carleton, who had been anxiously listening for the sound of the bell, entered the room. She had purposely asked for the wine, that he might see her drink it. A flush of hope came over his face as he hastened to hold the glass for her.

"Where is Frank?" asked Lady Carleton, in a voice so much firmer and clearer than usual, that everybody heard the question.

"I will fetch him, mother," said Arundel.



"Is dear Miss Price there?" she asked again. The old lady advanced to the bedside.

"God bless my darling!" she ejaculated. "You seem somewhat revived."

"I am. Where are the boys? I do not see them."

"They are coming, my love!"—said her husband. "Here they are!" And the two boys leaned forward to kiss her. She threw an arm gently round each, and gazed at them intently, murmuring blessings.—Miss Hastings beckoned Lord Carleton aside.

"Do not be deceived. She is very near her end. This sudden revival is but momentary. Farewell!—I will not intrude on the last scene. May God bless you, Frederick, and support you in this trying hour!"

"Ah, Margaret! There is another world for us all. There we shall meet again, freed from the sorrowful entanglements of this!" He pressed her hand, and led her to the door of the room.

"Who is that I see outside the door?—some one in a black dress?" whispered Lady Carleton to Arundel, as he bent over her, and rested his cheek on hers.

"It is Maggie, dearest mother. She came with her aunt. Would you like to see her?"

"Yes, my dear, very much! Tell them to bring her in. *Dear little Maggie!*"

Lord Merle went to the door, and spoke a few words to his father, who immediately afterwards led Maggie into the room. When she stood beside the bed she ventured to look up at Lady Carleton.

"Ah, Maggie, my dear! so you have come to see me!" said the invalid, stretching out a wan hand. The young girl sunk on her knees, and covered the hand with tears and kisses. The hand moved feebly, and rested on her head.—"God bless you, Maggie! May you live to be such a woman as your aunt! Come near to me. I have a word to say."

Maggie, in a state of suppressed agitation, rose from her knees, and bent to catch Lady Carleton's words. No one else

heard them. Whatever they were, Maggie seemed powerfully moved. She clasped her hands, and said in a low, fervent tone, "*I will, I will!*"

The dying lady kissed her cheek, and Margaret was drawn away, sobbing, by Lord Carleton.

When she recovered, half an hour afterwards, she found herself being lifted by some one into a carriage—the cold frosty air restored her thoroughly. "Aunt! are you here? Where are we going?"

"We are going home, my child," said her aunt, tenderly, taking her in her arms.

Maggie felt some hot tears fall on her face. She started. Her aunt—her cold, dignified aunt, was weeping.

"How is Lady Carleton?" asked Margaret. "Did you leave her better?"

"Well: perfectly well. She will never know earthly sorrow more!"

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE FORTESCUES AND MR. MORTON.

"Let thy kindred and allies be welcome to thy house and table. Grace them with thy countenance, and further them in all honest actions; for by this means thou shalt so double the bond of nature as thou shalt find them so many advocates to plead an apology for thee behind thy back. Be sure to keep some great man thy friend, but trouble him not for trifles."

LORD BURLEIGH'S *Advice to his Son.*

"All the delights of life, I say, would go to the dence if people did but act upon their silly principles, and avoid those whom they dislike and abuse. Whereas, by a little charity and mutual forbearance, things are made to go on pleasantly enough."

*Vanity Fair.*

THE Fortescues and Mr. Morton were related to the Rabys of Carleton. Mr. Morton was the only brother of the countess, and Lady Fortescue was her only surviving sister. Six months after that lady's death, things were going on much as they did before in Raby House—as far as could be judged by the world. The Earl of Carleton was still the most influential

person in the Cabinet. He gave dinners, balls, private evenings. Lady Fortescue, a fashionable little woman, whose husband, Sir John, was one of the earl's party, presided at his balls. Lord Carleton never spoke of his wife. His health was disturbed by her death, and he was absent from business for two months; after which time he seemed to apply himself wholly to politics.

Lady Fortescue bore some resemblance to her sister. "Like all the Morton girls," old Miss Price said, "she was better than she seemed, but not half as good as she might have been." She was lively, good-natured, and rather clever. If she had higher qualities latent within her, Sir John was precisely the sort of husband not to call them forth. She was successful. She loved the world, and the world loved her. If thoughts beyond the world sometimes entered her mind, and made her grave, they never stayed there long enough to make her sorrowful:—except on the death of her sister, Caroline. She played hostess at Raby House to a select party a few months after Caroline's death; but the most heartless of the guests went away with the conviction that "Clarissa had hard work to keep down her feelings to-night!"

By the most heartless of the guests, I mean to indicate Lady Fortescue's brother, Mr. Morton. A heartless man does not mean a man without a heart—one who has given it all away to another, and remains without any for himself—that is, as all the world agrees, a witless, senseless man. No!—a heartless man means one who keeps his heart, with all its feelings and emotions, for his own private advantage. Such a man was Henry Morton—formerly the well-behaved school and college companion of his cousin, the Earl of Carleton, now Mr. Morton, M.P., his brother-in-law—heir-at-law to North Ashurst, and sole guardian of his nephew, Sir Willoughby Morton—the richest young baronet in the three kingdoms. It seems somewhat beside the mark to tell you of a man's connexions when I wish to convey an idea of the man himself, but I have insensibly fallen into the usual fashion in describing Mr. Morton. Yet Mr. Morton was by no means an

insignificant person—a mere cipher—good for nothing but to swell the total of the figures which it follows; he had plenty of brains—a craving for distinction—and a conscience neither over nice nor over wise. In short, he was about the last man in the world to be characterised as a mere nobody, or as

—“that sort of tool

Which knaves do work with called a fool.”

Why, then, was it that the world valued Mr. Morton more for the sake of his brother-in-law and his nephew than for his own sake?—Simply because Mr. Morton did so himself.

Mr. Morton had, besides the usual minor ones, two master vices, both utterly destructive of true dignity of character.—I am by no means blind to the fact that a thoroughly *brave* man is a very rare creature, and a man utterly free from vanity still rarer; but Mr. Morton had more vanity than most men of his intellectual calibre, and less moral bravery. He was born with a clear, searching, sharp intelligence, which enabled him to see through the generality of men, and despise them. But he was also born with an inordinate love of admiration and a dastardly fear of the world.

Vanity and moral cowardice kept up a perpetual struggle in his breast: the one prompting him to do “deeds of high emprise,” for the sake of the praise of man; and the other withholding him from the attempt, by the fear of exciting the enmity of those whom he must oppose, in order to succeed; and by the fear of complete failure.

By the time he was thirty he understood himself better than most of us do; and when he came to that sorry understanding he was not a whit the better for it. The Platonic axiom, “know thyself,” when put into action, neither increased his wisdom nor his happiness. He saw nothing better for it than to go on doing, upon principle, what he had in youth done upon impulse—viz., to use all the cleverness of his head to cover the civil war always raging in his heart. He had a hard life of it. I never saw a man upon whose countenance care and bitterness had more distinctly set their seal.

Mr. Morton’s talent for diplomacy and finance was well

known, and Lord Carleton availed himself of it; giving in return the semblance of his friendship. This was useful in many important ways to Mr. Morton.

One word as to his outward man:—Mr. Morton was studiously polished in manner—in person he was tall, thin, handsome, and aristocratic; with a quick glance of the eye, and a weak, conceited, yet implacable jaw. The mouth was small, clever—mobile, and decidedly dishonest; the upper lip was too long. It was a mouth made for lying, flattery, and sarcasm. The nose was aquiline and handsome, but rather too large, though not sufficiently so to give weakness to the face. The forehead was narrow and high—the hair of a good brown—abundant, and fine in quality. The complexion, originally of a beautiful white and red—like his sister's, had become of a pale drab hue, which women thought was the effect of ill-health and over-study. It was only the effect of the evil feelings secretly and constantly at war in his heart; they had made him bilious and ill-tempered.

He wore his hair like the portraits of the men of the golden age of good Queen Bess, and he was vain of this resemblance. When every one wore powder and a smooth chin, he ventured to go about with short curled hair and a pointed beard. This audacity met with its reward in time. Many a pretty woman who believed that no man could be anything but frightful without powder and a queue, made an exception in favour of Mr. Morton.

"That strange style is really becoming to him!"—"There is something quite picturesque about it."—"He looks like a courtier of the Elizabethan age."—"Really his head has quite a poetic look!"—"A very interesting, thoughtful face!"—"How cleverly he talks, too—so much wit and sarcasm!"—"I dare say he is a poet!"—Thus the female fashionables judged of Mr. Morton's face. It had some characteristics of the Elizabethan age, for it was astute, shrewd, and grave with the wisdom of this world.—Mr. Morton at three-and-forty was still a bachelor. He rejoiced in the possession of the implicit confidence and boundless admiration of the wild-

goose, Sir Willoughby Morton, his nephew and ward. It was a beautiful thing, some people thought, to see the affection which subsisted between them.—Mr. Morton was a favourite with young men of the wealthier sort—in spite of his want of animal spirits and his worldly wisdom—for he could assume the one and lay aside the appearance of the other at will. He had the *entrées* of the best houses; and in virtue of his highly eligible ward, he could have obtained anything that depended on the votes of the mothers and daughters of the fashionable world. Lady Fortescue was proud of her brother, and fond enough of him to be unsuspicious when he made use of her for his private ends. The good-natured little woman was the tool of both brother and husband.

One morning when Mr. Morton was staying on a visit with the Fortescues, in Berkeley Square (a circumstance of frequent occurrence, as that gentleman found his sister's house more convenient, in many respects, than an hotel), the liveliness of the family breakfast party was somewhat checked by Sir John's dashing down the newspaper, with the exclamation,—  
“The Duke of Alderney is dead!”

Sir John and Mr. Morton exchanged sad, rueful looks. Let it not be supposed that they mourned for the loss of a beloved friend. No. It was by the duke's interest they had both been returned to Parliament;—failing which interest, they expected to be turned out.

“The Duke of Alderney dead!” exclaimed Lady Fortescue. “Why, he was perfectly well yesterday!—I met him riding in the Kensington Road, with those two beautiful little girls of his. Where's the paper?” She took it from beneath her husband's hand, and read the report of the sudden death of his Grace the Duke of Alderney. His horse ran away with him on the previous evening, and threw him head foremost on a heap of stones. He was taken up lifeless.

Poor Lady Fortescue was so moved by the account of this sad misfortune, and the thought of the now completely orphan state of the duke's two girls, that her pretty face was distorted with weeping.

"What a shocking thing, John!" And she appealed for sympathy to her husband. He stretched out his hand good-naturedly to her.

"Why, Clarissa, what makes you take it to heart so?"

She pressed the hard, white, gentlemanly hand.—"Good heavens, John! To think of any one we know so well—that I exchanged laughing words with yesterday—being carried off so suddenly! And his two sweet girls—quite orphans now!"

"Oh, they are capitally provided for, my dear—£20,000 a year each."

"But who will provide them with a father's affection, John?" said his wife, half indignant at him for talking so lightly. "Suppose it had been yourself?" And the poor little woman shuddered.

"Now, Clarissa, don't work yourself up to tragedy pitch. Just listen to me, my dear. You must not be absorbed in your own feelings on this occasion. Think of what your brother-in-law must feel. Lord Carleton and the duke were not only political allies, but relations—second cousins, you know, and intimate friends from boyhood."

"Ah, yes! I had forgotten! Frederick and the duke were really attached to each other. This blow must fall severely on him. I had better drive to St. James's Square as soon as possible, and see how he is. Will you ring the bell, Henry, and order the carriage?"

"That is acting like a sensible woman. I will call at Raby House on my way from the Treasury, and we can come back together. You will probably hear from Carleton how the duke has left his property," said the careful husband.

"I will inquire.—Now the Marquis of St. Ann's is dead, I suppose the dukedom of Alderney is extinct. It is a thousand pities that there are only those two girls!" sighed the good-natured Lady Fortescue, who really took an interest in her neighbour's concerns, without any ulterior hope of benefiting her own.

"The dukedom might be revived in favour of a proper

claimant, perhaps. Carleton was the duke's second cousin. Again, Lady Geraldine, or Lady Alice Trevor's husband, would have a good claim, if of sufficiently noble descent. You will probably hear who is appointed their guardian."

"Oh, Lord Carleton, I should fancy."

"Not at all unlikely."

"And then if the young viscount and one of the Ladies Trevor—a very proper match!—Why, they would unite the two claims to the dukedom! You said something about Carleton's wishing for a dukedom the other day.—Your notions always have something in them!"

"*Ah! vous dites cela!* You are really too flattering!" said her husband, laughing. "But your female wit has put my crude notion into a definite form, long before I should have done so myself. Besides—to tell you a secret, Clarissa, I do not think Carleton would like to merge his old earldom—with its time-honoured associations—in the comparatively modern dukedom of Alderney. Why should he not change the earldom for the dukedom of Carleton? And by marrying the eldest of these girls to his second boy, he might obtain a revival of the Alderney title for him."

"What! and make both his sons dukes? Ah! poor Caroline always said Frederick was ambitious!—That would be a clever piece of management. Don't you think so, Henry?"

"It sounds very well—as well as if it were in a book;—but, my dear sister, do not let the idea of the two dukedoms make you forget that the bereaved friend is awaiting your condolences, and that Johnson announced the carriage five minutes ago.—Good morning!—Yes, I will dine with you to-day. Shall I bring Willoughby?—Oh, Clarissa, find out, if you can, why Lord Carleton's carriage is so often at the gate of a house in Brompton. I have seen it there three times this week—I insinuate no scandal. But the charming retreat is tenanted by a lady."

"Really, you are too clever, Henry!" said Lady Fortescue, smiling. "Frederick is not quite so bad as some of



you wretches of men. It's very hard that he cannot go to a private lunatic asylum of Dr. Ward's, where his son was confined last year, without being suspected of such things. The house belongs to a maiden lady that Dr. Ward was just going to marry, when he died."

"Is Dr. Ward's *fiancée* a beautiful girl with magnificent auburn ringlets?"

"I really will not listen to anything you have to say!" And the indignant lady retreated from the room.

"Never fear; you will hear all about the auburn ringlets when she comes back!" said Sir John, turning over the newspaper—"that is, if it's all *correct*. And if it were not, I don't suppose the thing would interest you. What do you suspect? Not a second marriage just yet? Carleton cared for that good little wife of his."

"Ah! but he cared for somebody else first."

"*Et l'on revient toujours à ses premières amours*, eh?—Is the lady of the auburn ringlets compatible with the chronology of these anti-matrimonial *amours*?"

"As the *amorosa* herself, No; as the *result* of the amour, Yes."

"You are wrong, depend upon it, Morton."

"Why do you say so?"

"Because I know the man."

"Pshaw! we know nobody!—I shall call in St. James's Square about your time, and we may both come back with Clarissa."

Three hours later, Sir John handed his wife into the carriage at the portico of Baby House, he stepped in after her, and Mr. Morton followed.

"Well, my dear," said Sir John, kindly, "you have had but a sad visit."

"Yes; the sight of those poor Trevor girls was almost too much for me!—Frederick took Miss Price with him last night, and fetched them away from Alderney House. He is appointed guardian; and they are not to marry without his consent. For the next five years—until Lady Alice is twenty

and Lady Geraldine eighteen—they are to live with their aunt, old Lady Glengarry. After that time, Lord Carleton assumes the entire control over them; and in case of his death, who do you think is to be their guardian?—You will never guess! Why *you—mon respectable frère*!—You do not seem surprised.”

“I am a bad actor, you know. To say the truth, I was aware of the duke’s intention long ago.”

“That’s a lie!” thought Sir John Fortescue. He was right. Mr. Morton was as much surprised at this reversion of the dignity of guardian to the heiresses expectant of the ducal house of Alderney, as his brother and sister.

“I can’t think what puts it into people’s heads to make a bachelor like you guardian to their children!” said Lady Fortescue.

“Oh, his character for integrity and prudence, of course!” replied her husband.

“Yes, it must be that,” said Lady Fortescue, sinking back in her corner.

But she was not to repose yet. “Who was that stately dame in black that was talking to you and Carleton?” asked Sir John. “I did not catch her name, but I thought I recognised the face.”

“That is Miss Hastings, sister of Frederick’s friend, the rector of Carleton. And”—turning to her brother—“the owner of the pretty place at Brompton that excited your suspicion. I have been confounding her story with somebody else’s. She is the——”

“Mother of the auburn ringlets, eh?”

“Did I not say *Miss Hastings*? You are insupportable! No! she is aunt to Sophia Hastings, of the auburn locks.”

“Exactly so!” said Mr. Morton; “and Lord Carleton takes great interest in the aunt and niece?”

“He does; he was present at Miss Sophia’s marriage yesterday to young Russell, his under-secretary. He gave her away, and her father performed the ceremony.”

“Oh, does the rector of Carleton call himself father to that beautiful girl?”

"Well, I acknowledge she *is* beautiful, though her hair is red!" said the lady, with spirit.

Her husband laughed; her brother smiled a little. "You shall call it by what name you please; but I am afraid you will find that she is accustomed to think it her very best point. Now, your girls, Clarissa, have such splendid complexions, that their hair——"

"It is not so red as your new beauty's!" interrupted the mother.

"No, my dear; that is its defect. It is too yellow," said Morton.

"Don't tease her about the girls' hair! Don't fret about such a trifle, Clarry! If they can't get husbands here on account of their red hair, we will take them to Spain, where this defect will be their greatest charm. In the eyes of the hidalgos, red hair, you know, is a mark of pure Gothic blood, and is the greatest beauty a woman can have."

"Clarissa, I promise you that when I am Premier, Fortescue shall have the embassy to Madrid.—I can't do more than *that* for my red-haired nieces!"

"If I were Premier, you should have an embassy to Coventry!" said Lady Fortescue, without a grain of bitterness. She really liked her disagreeable brother.

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## CHAPTER X.

AN EVENING AT RABY HOUSE—MARGARET'S FIRST SIGHT OF THE FASHIONABLE WORLD.

—"We shall come too late.

*Romeo.* I fear, too early: for my mind misgives,  
Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,  
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date  
With this night's revels."

*Romeo and Juliet.*

"An uninitiated man cannot take upon himself to portray the great world accurately, and had best keep his opinions to himself, whatever they are."

*Vanity Fair.*

"Notes with many a winding bout  
Of linked sweetness long drawn out,  
With wanton heed and giddy cunning,  
The melting voice through mazes running—  
Untwisting all the chains that tie  
The hidden soul of harmony."

*L'Allegro.*

Do my readers remember that I have mentioned the family of the Greys—the Greys of Langford Grange, near Carleton? Mrs. Grey was present at my Aunt Margaret's christening, and poured a flood of provincial scandal upon Miss Price. Then, there was my grandfather's pupil, her son William, surnamed Brutus by my aunt, and his elder brother, a captain in the Guards. There was his sister, the showy, accomplished Carlotta, and the *père de famille*, John Grey, Esq.—The Greys were a good old county family, perfectly well connected, given to hospitality, and to thinking of themselves a great deal more highly than they ought to think,—after the manner of narrow-minded people everywhere, and of the country gentry especially, in our land of prejudice, pride, and property qualifications.

Carlotta Grey and Sophia Hastings had formed a violent friendship, based on a certain similarity in character, and a marked difference in personal appearance. Sophia was really pretty, with regular features and an elegant figure. Carlotta, on the contrary, was not pretty, nor very winning, but

extremely dashing. She had a large figure; indeed, fastidious persons said it was too large; but as Miss Carlotta had no misgivings on the subject herself, and bared her white shoulders in the most intrepid style—challenging, as it were, all the county to produce anything finer in that line—all the county took her at her own valuation, and pronounced her to be “a monstrous fine woman,” or as the equally elegant phrase of our day is, “a stunner.” In temperament, Carlotta was active and jovial; Sophia, lazy and sentimental; in conversation, Sophia displayed the English talent for silence, while Carlotta piqued herself upon talking with fashionable volubility “a leash of languages at once.” She had been six months in Paris, and had “swum in a gondola,” on the strength of which she displayed her knowledge of French and Italian as confidently as she exhibited her neck and shoulders.

The grand desire of both these young ladies was to become women of fashion; Carlotta had better prospects than Sophia, and generously promised to forward her friend’s interests in the world. I may as well add, that their friendship was knit more closely together by mutual confidences touching certain fancies which invaded their girlish repose at the age of sixteen. Sophia had a *penchant* for the handsome Lord Merle, and Carlotta nourished in heart something like love for Sophia’s brother, “gentle Jamie.” They talked together of these affairs, and advised and pitied one another; but after a year or two, they began to take a practical view of life, and were a little ashamed of having been so foolish. Carlotta spent a season in London, and in the following autumn a great banker, who was about to buy an estate near the Greys, and who wanted Mr. Grey’s interest to return him for the county, came down on a visit to Langford Grange, and proposed for Carlotta. Mr. Harrington was forty years old, and wore a wig. Carlotta was not twenty, and had shadowy hopes that “gentle Jamie” might awake some day to a sense of her charms. But then she had waited three years for the fulfilment of those hopes, and even Sophia

thought nothing would come of it. Mr. Harrington was handsome, *malgré ses quarante ans*, and had a fine house in Cavendish Square, and a park in Surrey—and was going to buy the Bloomfield estate, and be member for the county.

"So, upon the whole, Sophy, my child," said the bouncing belle to her bosom friend, "I think I shall oblige papa and mamma, and marry him! What's the use of making a fuss about these things? One must be married, you know! I would rather have married for love if I could, but if I can't marry for love, I will for fashion. I know my own mind, *ma petite*. I would—yes, really, I *would*, have lived in the country on a small income all my days with your brother; but, *carissima*, with no one else! *Puisque cela m'est defendu*, I take the next best thing. I'll marry a good sort of a gentleman, whom I don't at all dislike, and I'll live in London and go to Court, and do *tout ce qu'il me plaira*. You shall come and see me, and forget, in the *succès* you will assuredly have, the *bei occhi* of *un certo giovine ingrato*."

The silent Sophia approved of her friend's good sense; and appeared so transcendently lovely as bridesmaid, in white silk and point lace (a present from Carlotta), that young Sidney Russell, one of the groom's-men, fell desperately in love with her on the Harringtons' wedding-day. Carlotta contrived to let Lord Carleton know that young Russell only wanted an assurance of his lordship's goodwill towards him, to propose for the Rev. Henry Hastings' daughter, and to marry her immediately. Lord Carleton sent for the young man, and engaged him as his private secretary, promising that, if he had merit, he should not want favour. Sidney Russell knew that the place and the promise were to be all Sophia's portion, and as his friends did not think it a bad one, they expedited the match.

My grandfather had no idea that the Earl of Carleton had any hand in securing his daughter so satisfactory a husband;—he believed that it was entirely a love match! Whether Lord Carleton knew anything of his son Merle's juvenile flirtation with Sophia, whether Sidney Russell knew of it,

and whether Sophia thought her beauty only had won her the hand of a cadet of a noble house—this deponent sayeth not.

On the evening when these ladies are about to be introduced to the reader, one had been married four and the other three years; they had both improved in manners and appearance, and were still the best friends in the world. They were seated in Mrs. Harrington's drawing-room in Cavendish Square, so very splendidly dressed that it was clear they were going to exhibit themselves elsewhere than in the bosom of domestic life.

"How very late the girl is! I really will not wait more than a quarter of an hour longer! What time is it now, William?"

A large, heavy young man, who looked like a well-padded guardsman buttoned up by mistake in a clerical coat, proceeded to draw out a watch of the period from its abiding-place. The act was certainly not rapidly performed.

"How slow you are, William! Is it half-past nine yet?"

"No, Carlotta; it is exactly five-and-twenty minutes past nine, by the Guards."

"And Lady Fortescue told us not to be late, or we should miss the *entrée* of the Prince and the royal Dukes! If she were not *your* sister, Sophia, I really would not wait!"

"I dare say it is not her fault. She never was behindhand formerly," said Mr. William Grey, yawning, and then settling his cravat.

"Ah, *juste ciel*! There is a carriage at last!—It must be Margaret!—Are you quite ready, Sophia?—William, just knock at Mr. Harrington's door, and say we are going, and that I expect him to come home with us."

William's long legs had scarcely measured the space from the fireplace to the door, when he was met face to face by some one entering hurriedly. This event seemed to put his sister's commission out of his head. It was young Margaret Harrington.

Very sorry, Mrs. Harrington; but something un-

expected happened before I came out, and I could not leave my aunt."

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope, my dear?"

"Oh, no!" And Margaret smiled, as if the matter were the reverse of unpleasant.

"Let me see your dress, child!" said Mrs. Russell, with some anxiety.

Margaret dropped the cloak that covered her, and revealed a dress that gave a severe shock to her sister.

"Plain India muslin, with a blue sash and sleeves, tied up with blue ribbon! Your hair not even frizzed and curled! What does my aunt mean by sending you to your first ball—a ball at Raby House—where the very first people in the kingdom will be, dressed in that trim?"

Margaret coloured. "I am very sorry, Sophia, but the fact is, the dressmaker, who had a very pretty rose-coloured brocaded silk to make for me, entirely forgot the order, and sent to say so, to-day, just in time for Audrey to prepare this old dress.—I was very vexed, you may be sure, but it was no use sitting down to cry over it; and as I really want to see a dozen famous men who will be at Raby House to-night, I preferred going in my old frock to not going at all;—especially as my aunt said it was not likely *you* would care very much about my dress in so great a crowd. Nobody knows me, you know."

Mrs. Harrington put on the cloak again, and said, patting Margaret on the shoulder, "*O'est inconcevable!* You are a strange creature! If the wretch of a dressmaker had served me such a trick——"

"You would have trimmed her jacket nicely, I am sure!" said her brother.

Margaret turned round, and laughed at the sight of her old friend. "Ah! Brutus!—I beg your pardon—Mr. William Grey—how do you do?" And she put out one of the round, white arms from beneath the cloak. He took her hand in his, held it for a moment, blushed, stammered, tried to laugh, and dropped it. At this moment a servant announced that



the carriage was waiting, and they lost no time in going to it. In St. James's Square they fell into the string of carriages making their way to Raby House, and were set down in their turn. William Grey drew Margaret's arm within his as they stood in the hall, saying:—

"Never mind your sister. Carlotta will take care of her. She's as good as a man! Besides, they are both used to these affairs, and you are not. Don't be afraid. Here; I'll get rid of your cloak."

Freed from that incumbrance, Margaret's arm went back very comfortably within that of her huge friend; and seeing Mrs. Harrington and Mrs. Russell close before her, she was quite at ease, and her brown eyes glanced brightly about as she was led through the thronged vestibule and up the spacious staircase. Her thoughts went back involuntarily to the only time she had ever been there before. How different it all looked! In place of the dim light—the whispering servants—the air of depression and sorrowful anticipation, there was a blaze of splendour in the hall—gorgeous exotics sent a rich perfume into the warm air, from either side, while in the centre moved groups of magnificently-dressed men and women. Jewels, feathers, and silks of rainbow hues glittered, waved, and rustled on all sides: soft voices and low silvery laughter came confusedly on her ear.

"You are very fortunate, Margaret!" said Mrs. Harrington, turning to adjust her train. "There was a drawing-room to-day, and so the men as well as the women are *en grande toilette* to-night. *Ciel!* Look at the jewels in that sword-hilt!"

"Who is that gentleman in the military uniform?—there! smiling to that beautiful lady?" asked Margaret, fixing her eyes on a noticeable man who stood in the centre of a group near them.

"That's the Duke of Wellington! That's Lady S——. She's reckoned a great beauty, you know!" said Mr. William Grey, looking at Margaret to see how much Court scandal she knew.

"I should think so, indeed. What a graceful, lovely creature! What a sweet melancholy in her smile! I am sure she does not spend much time in the fashionable world—she looks above this earth."

William Grey appeared to be much amused at this speech; and when Margaret requested to know why he laughed at her, the only reply she elicited was,—

"Bless your innocence! That's what *you* see in her pretty face is it?"

Here Carlotta turned again. "Well, Margaret; isn't the duke a handsome man?"

"The Duke of Wellington? Oh dear, no! I don't think him at all *handsome*; but he has a powerful face. I'm satisfied with him."

"Oh, the duke will do—will he?" said some one close to Margaret's elbow. It was her brother James, who had been waiting in the hall for the last hour, expecting the arrival of this party. "You must not express your opinions quite so freely here. People have wonderfully quick ears. How is my aunt? How are you, darling?" he added, in a lower whisper. "Well, I see. But"—looking at her dress—"what is this?"

"The pretty silk frock you gave me, dear? I knew you would be disappointed almost as much as I was; but I'll tell you all about it another time. - It could not be helped. Now I see how very splendid the ladies are, I regret it less than I did; for it would have been quite overlooked. I intend to produce a grand effect with my rose-coloured brocade and a train. You shall see me wear it on some other occasion, where it will not be lost among more showy dresses."

They were just at the foot of the staircase, and Margaret was thinking that it would be very pleasant if William Grey would go away and leave her and James together, when she observed a handsome face smiling down from the first landing-place upon James and herself. A movement in the crowd showed her the whole figure. It was that of a strikingly handsome young man, in a Court-dress.

"Look, James! Is not that Frank—I mean Lord Merle? He seems to be wanting to speak to you."

Her brother looked up; and the two friends exchanged glad telegraphic signs.

"What does he mean by all those movements?" said Margaret.

"He wants us to be as quick as we can; in ten minutes Catalani is going to sing, and he thinks you will be delighted to hear her. He is going to wait where he is till we come. He was with me down here for a long time watching for you all; but he was obliged to go back to his father and Lady Fortescue, and I promised to pioneer your party to the saloon as soon as you arrived. However, he has become impatient, I see, and has got half-way down stairs again."

"Dear Frank!" said Margaret. "How handsome he is; and how fond he seems of you! I hardly knew him in that fine dress."

"My dear Margaret, let me caution you again. Remember the difference of rank and sex—*Lord Merle*—no more Frank. It is not the usual style, and would be misunderstood," said James, gently. "You must learn to attend to these things."

"Thank you, dear," said Margaret; "I forget terribly all about proprieties. I hate every new propriety I hear of, and and love all my old improprieties. I suppose"—and she gave a bright, sly glance sideways—"I may not call him '*Brutus*' any more? Yet he is just as delightfully dense as ever; and I don't feel the slightest inclination to be distant and polite. I wish I were not seventeen. I don't half like growing into a woman. I may not say anything that is natural."

James smiled affectionately. "You may say all you like to me, dear, and to Merle too; only give him his title."

"How do you do?" And they stopped while Carlotta and Sophia spoke to some acquaintances. "Ah, Sir Willoughby! I thought you were in Paris."

The extravagantly-dressed dandy thus addressed replied, "I was; only nunky sent for me. He thought this affair would be a complete failure unless I graced it with my pre-

sence; and as I thought certain fair ladies here might languish for my smile, why I braved the perils of the deep yesterday, and arrived *tout épuisé* at Dover last night, and suffered *la peine forte et dure* in that horrid machine, a post-chaise, all this morning. Fact! isn't it, uncle?"

The person thus appealed to was a striking-looking man, plainly dressed, with a short, pointed beard, and unpowdered hair. Margaret was much puzzled by his face. It reminded her of some one she knew, but she did not recollect who, at the moment. He laughed, with what she thought unjustifiable good-nature, at his nephew's foolish chatter. In the midst of his laughing declaration that "really Willoughby deserved the crown of martyrdom," he caught her searching eyes fixed on his face, and appeared to be taken *aback* for a moment. Then, suddenly recollecting himself, he greeted her two companions with marked cordiality.

"Ah, Mr. James Hastings! it's not often I have the pleasure of seeing you now. Mr. Grey, too. My dear fellow, I'm delighted to see you. My brother-in-law will turn from many a town acquaintance to shake hands with such a familiar country friend." His brother-in-law scarcely remembered the existence of this familiar country friend; but the unsuspecting Grey took the diplomatist *au pied de la lettre*, and was as pleased as if he really had received a shake of the hand from the minister.

Mr. Morton saw at a glance that Mrs. Harrington and Mrs. Russell had no older women with them, and only "two boys" as escort; he therefore coolly arranged matters to suit himself and his nephew.

"Mrs. Harrington," he said, "you will never get to my sister at this rate. Will you take my arm? Willoughby, if you are not too fatigued, give your arm to Mrs. Russell; Grey and Hastings will take charge of the young lady.—And now follow, steadily." The rest was addressed to Mrs. Harrington, in a low, familiar whisper. "You and I are the best pioneers. I think you understand the principle of progress. Never let any one jostle you out of the ground you

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have gained. Forward! forward! No retreat. Never give ground for an instant. Bear on gently; insinuate yourself softly and politely. There: now we have ample space. Who is the little girl with the brown eyes? Sister of Mrs. Russell? Why is she dressed *en enfant*? To make the fair Sophia seem younger?"

"Oh dear, no! Sophia does not need that. I think Margaret looks quite as old as Sophia. Sophia has a particularly young look."

"Silly women, with small features and good skins, always have. Mrs. Russell will look like an old *girl* at forty—not like a mature woman. That sister, with the eyes and the school-girl costume, has got more of the woman already in her look."

"What, that little unformed thing? And Sophia, you said the other night, was a complete woman of fashion, and one of the handsomest creatures in town. I don't understand you. I thought you admired my friend."

"Sometimes. But I generally prefer something more *prononcée* than Mrs. Russell, and something less plain and provincial than her sister." And his false mouth smiled approval on the comely Mrs. Harrington. She tapped his arm with her fan, and said, "*Dites cela aux Anglais!*" He looked at her impressively; and then began to inquire about the best time for catching Mr. Harrington at home.

Sophia and Sir Willoughby Morton were talking near them, and gazing at intervals on the stream of fine people who passed by.

"Did you really come over because you thought Carlotta and I should be here?"

"'Pon honour! Only *you* put Carlotta in. I didn't, 'pon honour!"

Sophia simpered something to the effect that he was "a sad flatterer," and then earnestly begged him to tell her whether her train was long enough, and if her sleeves were of the veritable latest mode. Sir Willoughby was a high authority on these matters, and would not peril his judgment on such important points until he had seen them at a distance.

"How can I judge of the train until you dance? or of the cut of the sleeves either? As to the *matériel*, you may set your heart at ease. Madame Récamier wore a *robe* of lute-string, *moiré*, *bleu de ciel*, exactly like yours, with necklace and bracelets of pearls, at the Hotel de —."

"You don't say so?" said the fair Sophia; and her blue eyes danced with joy, while a soft blush of vanity overspread her cheek, and her beauty became radiant. Her deepest feelings had been gratified. "Her dress like Madame Récamier's!"

"Willoughby, will you be good enough to conduct Mrs. Harrington to Lady Fortescue before Catalani begins? Mrs. Russell, allow me." And the next moment Sophia was being led onwards by Lord Merle.

Sir Willoughby was obliged to follow with Carlotta, for Mr. Morton was arrested by a personage of importance, and they lost sight of him.

James Hastings smiled quietly, and William Grey brightened up, and said, "What an uncommonly clever fellow Lord Merle is!—When he wants to have a thing done, he does it."

"Yes," said Margaret. "He does not wait to see whether it will do itself. But I don't understand how this remark applies, now?"

"Why, he didn't want us to be kept shilly shally here. He wanted to get rid of that Mr. Morton (monstrous clever fellow, Miss Margaret; but Lord Merle hates him!)—and he wanted to get your sister away from that confounded puppy, Sir Willoughby. Sophia, you know——"

Here he was interrupted by the stoppage of their party at the entrance of the saloon, where Lord Carleton was standing to receive his guests.

To casual observers, Lord Carleton did not appear to be altered since his wife's death. As Margaret saw him now,—with every advantage of costume and the excitement of society, she was surprised to find how little she had before observed the noble presence and stately bearing of the man. The features were more strongly marked than formerly, and



there were lines about the mouth, and a few perpendicular wrinkles in the forehead, which showed that though he was smiling now, the habitual expression of the face was stern rather than melancholy, and sorrowful rather than gentle. His hair had fallen away from the temples, and what remained of those once abundant locks was almost white; but the fashion of wearing powder hid the change, and as his figure was still graceful—unbent, as well-proportioned as ever, and full of vigour and activity,—the Earl of Carleton at fifty-four years of age was pronounced, by most men and all women, a very handsome man. Margaret could not help admiring the stately, accomplished gentleman, who bent so politely over Mrs. Harrington's hand, and then over that of Sophia. The fine dress, the courtly manner, and the changed expression of face, saddened her. She thought of the days when she had seen him stretched on the sofa in the countess's *boudoir*, chatting and laughing with the sweet wife who sat on the low seat beside him. It was an unlucky thought, for it brought the tears into Margaret's eyes, and they were glistening there when Lord Carleton looked at her. He half started;—the courteous, pleasant smile passed away from his lips, and he pressed them firmly together for a moment. Probably the sight of her young face recalled the past too forcibly to his mind. He took her hand; it trembled with the emotion she was endeavouring to suppress, and it was in vain he tried to smile once more, and repeat the kind compliments he was wont to address to young girls. He could only press her hand convulsively (the marks of his fingers were visible when she drew her glove off), while he murmured, "God bless you, Maggie!" and then turned away. He coughed, took out his handkerchief, and the next moment was talking in Spanish with the ambassador of his Catholic Majesty, as composedly, and with as stately an air, as if he had been a Spaniard himself. No one seemed to have observed anything peculiar in the earl's manner. The crowd increased every moment, and the sound of music rose and fell, while the buzz of conversation was becoming as loud as aristocratic propriety permitted.

Margaret turned her eyes away from the earl, and looked for her companions. They had moved a few steps further into the room to the spot where Lady Fortescue was seated in state, with the dowagers and dames of the greatest credit and renown; but the guests clustered so thickly there, that she could not see them. She was looking about in search of her friends, when she felt some one take her hand, and draw it through his arm, pressing it gently as he did so.

"I will take you to James and Sophia; they are just here!" A tall young man, plainly dressed, but distinguished by his remarkably graceful bearing, stood beside her.

"Is it Arundel?" she asked, half doubtingly. "Ah! I have been looking for you ever since we came! My aunt told me you were returned from Germany, and would be here to-night. How was it I did not see you?"

"You were occupied with my father. I was standing beside him then, Maggie, but you did not see me—your eyes were in your heart!" He pressed her hand again. "Stop a minute, and let this mob go by. Oh, what a blessing it is to look on some one who is *not* changed! You are, I see, I know, I feel, the same dear, kind, darling girl that used to run about with me in the old garden at the Rectory, and play at hide-and-seek at the Castle, and write Latin verses (with occasional eccentricities as to quantity) under the walnut-tree in the paddock—I think you *climbed* that tree once!—I know you vowed you would." What are you thinking of, Maggie? You look grave, not to say severe."

"Do I? I am glad to see Lord Carleton look so well, and Lord Merle too. Is it Oxford, or full-dress, that has improved him so much?"

"Merle? Improved? Perhaps he is; but I am slow to perceive any improvement in those I love. Merle is always the same in my eyes. I have met with no one to compare with him!" And the large liquid blue eyes, dusky as violets, glanced fondly towards his brother.

"Not in your German university?" asked Maggie.

Arundel laughed. "Oh, there is nothing in any German

university to compare with my brother, I assure you. Not being accustomed to the sight of humanity in *that* stage of development," pointing to the fine figure of Lord Merle, "my fellow-students would have erected altars to him had he been there. They would have mistaken him for an avatar of Apollo."

"And what did the German students think of *you*?" inquired Margaret.

"I never gave myself the trouble to inquire. I was too busy. I had a great deal to learn, but was cut short in the midst."

"My aunt thought you were over-working yourself. It was she who advised Lord Carleton to send for you home; he has been so occupied with public business that he might have neglected to do so."

"And *you* urged her to do it, I hear?" Arundel's beautiful eyes looked directly into Margaret's. Hers were too honest to look a lie.

"We were afraid you would make yourself ill, Arundel! We could not bear the idea of your being ill in a strange country!—Are you angry with us?"

"You are very kind, Maggie!—and so is your aunt!" said her companion, in a low, moody tone. "I really believe you have affection for me, both of you,—and therefore I cannot but be grateful for this interference in my affairs; but it was very disagreeable to me to return so soon. You misapprehended matters. I was well—perfectly well."

"What are you two talking so gravely about?" inquired Lord Merle, joining them. His smile acted like sunshine, his voice like music, upon his brother.

"I was behaving like a fool!" he replied. "Regretting the thing that is irrevocable."

Lord Merle's ingenuous face wore an uneasy expression for a moment, as he looked from one to the other. "Come, come! We must have no retrospections on a night like this.—Do not let him talk to you about early days, Miss Margaret!"

"Oh!" he exclaimed, catching James Hastings by the arm, who was passing near them, "here, my dear fellow! Here is the runaway fair!—My proposal is that we all four repair to the music-room. I have secured such a snug little corner, with just four seats, where we can hear that divine woman in comfort."

"They are flocking to the music-room," said Arundel, drawing Margaret's arm through his, and leading her on, and explaining to her, as they went, the nature of his arrangements with Catalani.

Much as Margaret admired Catalani's voice, her pleasure was increased by hearing that Arundel was going to sing a duet with her. Garcia's throat had been seized that day with one of those many maladies incident to the throats of singers. Margaret thought that her friend's voice was almost as fine as Garcia's, and she knew his taste and musical knowledge were very much better than Catalani's.

"Oh, I could not have wished for a greater treat! Tell me all about this opera of Mozart's. I know very little about it. Few people in England do;" she exclaimed, as she hung on the arm of Arundel, with all the confidence inspired by sympathy and old familiarity.

"What a sweet unaffected girl your sister Margaret is!" said Lord Merle to James Hastings, as they kept close behind them. "It is astonishing when one compares her with other girls. She is positively a wonder! I can't think how she has managed to grow up like that. To look in her face, now, I should say that, except for a certain womanliness, she is the same warm-hearted, clear-headed child she was seven years ago."

James looked pleased; but a moment after said, with a sigh, "Poor Maggie! I am sometimes very much troubled about her."

"Which way, Frank?" inquired Arundel, looking back. "Where is your harbour of refuge in this human sea? Depend upon it other adventurers have taken possession of it by this time."

"No, no. I've established a good *locum tenens* there.—The recess between the third and fourth windows.—Look out for the head of 'Brutus' above the crowd!"

"You don't mean to say you have been making Grey keep those places for us?" said James Hastings, laughingly, as they proceeded slowly through the crowd.

"I do though! *Il ne demandait pas mieux*. I made use of a talismanic word by which I have discovered he can be made as serviceable and as obedient as any slave of the ring or the lamp in an Arabian tale. There are such words for every one of us, Hastings. There's an 'Open Sesame!' to every heart. Ah! was it not well to have faith in my friend Brutus? See! the good booby has stood patiently in that position ever since I left him. Bless his great stupid face! Does it not remind you of the old days at the Rectory? See! he brightens just as he used to do when Arundel or Margaret spoke to him. Ah! Arundel is shaking hands with him now!—My dear Grey, I am heartily ashamed of having kept you waiting so long; but I had some difficulty in getting our little party together."

"Oh, pray don't mention it. Very glad to have been of use. It's quite like old times to see all of us together again!" jerked out the good-natured Brutus, colouring with pleasure.

"But Margaret must have a chair!" interposed Arundel.

"Grey," said Lord Merle, "let the good folks see the comfortable quarters we have provided for them!" So saying, they drew back a curtain which hung behind the spot on which Mr. William Grey had been standing to prevent others from approaching it too nearly, and discovered a semicircular recess, or arch, in which Lord Merle had, early in the evening, caused a servant to place four small chairs, and then draw the curtain before it.

"Not a bad idea of Merle's, is it, Margaret?" said Arundel, as they sat down. "The very best place in the room, you see!—just in front of the piano!—Nobody will be between us and it when she begins. She will never have a crowd in front of her—she's imperative on that point."

"Then I shall see you both well!" said Margaret, settling herself between her brother and Arundel with such an expression of pure, unqualified happiness in her face that Lord Merle was arrested for a moment by its radiance, as he stood before them, having courteously insisted on William Grey's occupying the fourth chair.

"What makes you look so very happy to-night, Margaret?" he inquired.

"How can you ask? Is not Catalani going to sing Mozart's music? Are we not all here together to enjoy it? Is it not charming to see all these gay-looking people—some such beautiful faces, too? I should be a strange creature if I were not happy! Don't talk to me, please. I am so full of joy I must sober myself a little, or I shall be quite wild when they begin the '*Crudel perchè?*'"

"That does not come first. She sings '*Deh Vieni*,' from the same opera, first. She has done that to oblige me, not that she cares for it very much herself—it's not quite to her taste. But it shows off her voice well, and she is so very quick and clever that she has got the right spirit already. I heard her sing it this morning. It was delicious. You know she has been always singing Paër, Spontini, Fioravanti, Mosca, and Cimarosa; as yet, she knows little of Mozart. As little almost as you do. Oh, Maggie! I wish you could have been with me in my late German tour! Then you would have had some idea of what Mozart and Haydn are. But even in Germany they are very little known. Have you heard of our new musical society in London? We got it up more than two years ago."

"The Philharmonic Society?" asked Margaret. "Oh yes; I've heard of it from the Harringtons. There is a movement at the piano! Madame Catalani is smiling at you, and beckoning. You must go."

Arundel went, and Lord Merle took his seat. "Bold in Arundel to venture to sing with her, is it not?" he asked. "But he has got so used to singing and playing with all sorts of musical celebrities in Germany that he does not mind it at

all. I think he has more self-possession and assurance than any fellow I ever saw. See how he is leading her to her place, and takes his own beside her. Ah! that man with the moustache is going to play an accompaniment. No; Arundel is. By Apollo! that's going *too* far, Maggie. But I suppose for Catalani the Regent himself would be but too happy to play an accompaniment. He takes no more notice of this great roomful of people than if they were so many stones! He sees nothing but Catalani! She seems immensely taken with him, too! How she laughs! What a charming, bewitching face she has! How all those dandies are envying Arundel! Now, they are going to begin. Oh, a recitative!"

Catalani then sang the "*Deh Vieni*," from Mozart's "Figaro." It was little known to the company, and produced a sensation. While the cantatrice was receiving the praises and thanks of her adorers, Arundel slipped away to rejoin Margaret. He looked at her with a smile of ecstasy, such as she had never seen before.

"Oh, Margaret! if such things could last for ever!"

"We should be worn out in much less time than threescore years and ten," said Lord Merle. "I could not bear much of that. It is too beautiful! I must go and thank the witch." And he rose.

"You are not well, my dear Maggie!" said Arundel, bending forward kindly.

She drew back. "I am quite well, I thank you. Do not call me dear Maggie, just as if I were a child!"

"I will attend in future to that important matter; but just now, perhaps, you had better let me use the privilege of an old friend, and take you out of the room. Miss Price will take care of you. You are really too ill to enjoy the music."

"Excuse me, I enjoy it very much. I am longing for your duet. There! Madame Catalani is looking for you—is sending some one to fetch you! It is Lord Merle."

"Can she be jealous, at so early an age, of Catalani's beauty and talent?" thought Arundel, as he went away, perplexed at Margaret's manner. "She has talent herself. Perhaps

she has an artist's jealousy. Impossible! Not simple Maggie Hastings! Something has made her cross. That stupid Grey, perhaps. However, she is so sweet a creature, she will not be cross long.—How very handsome Catalani is!" And in a moment he was engaged in a lively conversation with the singer, who quite fascinated him for the moment, and who, in her turn, was charmed with the aristocratic young amateur, "*qui avait tant de science et de goût—qui n'avait pas l'air anglais—qui était adorable, avec ses manières moitié grand seigneur, moitié jeune artiste!*"

Margaret heard her say to him "*Mais venez donc, milor! tout le monde nous attend!*" She saw the sweet smile bestowed upon Arundel, and she saw Arundel's joyous look in reply. They stood together reading the music, and whispering, while the symphony was being played. How delighted he looked!—then he began "*Crudël perchè?*"—singing, not like an automaton, nor like a heartless *roué*—as the Count in "*Le Nozze di Figaro*" is—but like what was in Mozart's mind when he wrote the music. He sang like a true and passionate lover. Inspired by the music and Catalani, his fresh pure voice scarcely betrayed its want of volume, except to the professional ears present. He was so free from vanity, that he was never hampered in his execution by the fear that he should not do himself justice or be admired enough. The duet went perfectly—Catalani holding in her voice that it might not overpower that of her companion, and entering into the spirit of her part. Her arch playfulness was adapted to a drawing-room on this occasion, and not to the stage. When Arundel repeated for the last time, "*mi sento*," his face was so rapturous, so transformed with joy, that Margaret heard murmurs of admiration near her, and she saw the smile of approval on Catalani's beautiful lips. The smile meant merely—"Très bien! mais très bien, mon petit!" but Margaret heard Mr. Morton say to Mrs. Harrington, as the music ceased,—

"See! Those two people are turning each other's heads, Arundel will grow giddy before long!"

"By Jove! he's a lucky fellow. I'd like Catalani to make



me giddy," said some young man near them. "I shouldn't care if I never walked steadily again. Heavens! what a smile she has!"

Mr. Morton happened to look round. He saw Margaret behind him, leaning back in her chair, gazing with great, wistful eyes on the group in front of the piano, and breathing fitfully, as if still listening to the impassioned music. He did not forget she was there as he went on talking with his companions, who were standing before her. She had excited his curiosity all the evening.

"But it's nonsense to talk about a woman of Catalani's age in that way. She is old enough to be Arundel's mother," said Mrs. Russell.

"Is she old?" asked Brutus. "I never should have thought it!"

"You would not have thought about it, you mean," said Mr. Morton. "I will tell you a little fact, Mrs. Russell,—which you and Mrs. Harrington, and other handsome young women do not seem to know. Youth is not indispensable for a fair enslaver. Great as is the charm of youth in a woman, there are some women who can do without it—nay, because they are without it, men are disposed to believe that youth is something not worth having—any change in *them* would be for the worse. Women of moderate beauty, and great originality of character, have a sort of bodily originality and uniqueness which makes them perpetually charming. Age cannot wither them. Cleopatra or Catalani at fifty, is worth a dozen fair maidens of sixteen, in the eyes of any young man of taste and feeling. My nephew, there, is quite *épris*; and on my honour, I don't wonder at it, for she has shown great liking to him this evening."

"My wise uncle judges from his knowledge of ordinary men," said Lord Merle to James Hastings. He has no notion of the transitory emotions that impel without taking possession of the artistic soul. There is not depth of passion enough, not solidity enough, in that sweet singer yonder, to touch my brother's heart; though he loves her voice, and is

pleased with her altogether. My belief is, that in spite of the ministrings to *la belle passion* which he has found in music, painting, and poetry, my brother Arundel is as yet unscathed. He likes the society of women; but he likes books and music better. As for me, just now, I'm half in love with two girls I never saw!"

"That's a safe passion, at all events," said James, laughing. "Who are the unknown, divided objects?"

"The Trevor girls, my father's wards. They are coming to live with us in less than a year. What's the matter? Margaret ill? Is she? This confounded heat! All these people standing before her. She is not used to these things. Here, get her out of that crowd to this door. It leads to Miss Price's rooms. I thought Arundel was with her!—Ah, he's deep in his flirtation with Catalani. However, she will go soon, and then the dancing will begin. We must have Margaret well again for that. She used to be so fond of dancing!"

"I need not say anything to Mrs. Harrington, I suppose, if you take her to Miss Price?" he inquired, as he opened the side door.

"Oh, no!" said Margaret, faintly, "don't say a word!—I shall be better presently. The room is too warm. Thank you!"

James conducted her through the door, and Lord Merle followed, closing it behind him.

"A wonderfully clever little girl that—with her bright brown eyes and light hair!" said Mr. Morton, in a whisper to Sir John Fortescue. "She knows what she's about. Simplicity is her cue."

"She's not at all pretty, but there's something that arrests attention about her. She looks like a picture I have seen," replied Sir John. "What's all that? Oh, Catalani going! This room will soon be emptied. I've a word to say to you, Morton, and to Willoughby and Arundel. Bring them here if you can." And Sir John turned to a group of ladies, who looked as if they wanted somebody to talk to them. Sir John laid it down as a rule at evening parties to say as many

civil words to as many uninteresting people as he could conveniently come at. Fair words cost nothing, but they buy golden opinions.

## CHAPTER XL

### OUT OF THE FASHIONABLE WORLD.

"Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air,  
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars."

MARLOWE.

"Dead shepherd! Now I know thy saw of might;  
'Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight?'"

*As you Like It.*

"When men were fond, I smiled and wondered how!"

*Measure for Measure.*

"WHAT a relief!" exclaimed Lord Merle, as soon as he had shut out the sounds of the music-room. They were in a cool, dimly-lighted lobby. "This is elysium, after that heat and glare. However, I am an *âme damnée*, and must go back as soon as I have shown you the way to Miss Price's rooms. She looks very pale! Get her to the good old woman as fast as you can. This way! There,—knock at that door. I hope you will soon be able to come back. Yes; that's the door!"

James, with Margaret half fainting on his arm, knocked at the door indicated. There was an immediate reply of "Come in." James went in accordingly; and if Lord Merle could have seen into Miss Price's room at that moment, he would have entered too, in spite of the attractions of the ball and the promise to his father.

"My dear Miss Price, will you excuse this intrusion? My sister is ill, and Lord Merle suggested that I should bring her to you——"

"Is it Margaret?" inquired the old lady, rising hastily from her seat between two young ladies, who also rose, and looked compassionately at Margaret. "Here, my dear Mr. James, place her on this sofa near the window—poor girl! I

suppose the rooms are very crowded. What folly it is to invite your friends to come and be stifled!"

"I think the music has affected her rather too much," said James, putting back Margaret's hair tenderly from her forehead, as he bent over the arm of the sofa on which he had laid her.

"Don't lean over her, my dear James!" said Miss Price. "She wants air, and a little cold water. Will you ring the bell?"

As James turned to look for the bell, a female voice of strangely sweet quality sounded in his ear.

"You need not ring; my sister has gone to fetch water."

For the first time he saw the speaker distinctly. What a contrast to the gorgeously adorned women that lately thronged around him, and dazzled his eyes or pleased his fancy. It was a young lady whose quaint simplicity of attire (something between a Quaker and a nun) did not conceal, as it was intended to do, the extraordinary brilliancy of her beauty. A gown of grey stuff enveloping the figure to the throat, and relieved only by a small white collar, did not hide the exquisite nobleness of her young form,—nor did the little white cap, *à la sœur de charité*, conceal the shape of that beautiful head, or the rare perfection of the Rafaëlle-like face.

James Hastings could not choose but gaze upon so fair a vision. While his eyes were still fixed—half fearing that it would melt into the air and prove to be such stuff as dreams are made of—lo! a second form, clothed like the first, stood beside her, bearing a crystal ewer. Together they approached his sister, and began to bathe her face and chafe her hands. They were silent, and graceful as ministering spirits. That second apparition was fair—more beautiful than any earthly creature he had ever seen, except the first. *She* was a miracle that earth in all its mighty round could not match. Soon his eyes saw only her as she stood at Margaret's head, with her lovely face bowed, and her large lustrous eyes shadowed by their transparent lids, fixed in tender pity on the senseless girl.

"Surely there is something more than human in that beauty!" his heart whispered. "Angel—ah! now I see that men are not fools or madmen when they call a woman *angel*. Thy Spirit, O God, looks out from that face. Thou hast vouchsafed so much of goodness and harmonious beauty—so much of divinity to this, thy creature—that it were scarcely idolatry to kneel. All the air is full of her, and reflects her beauty—the place on which she stands is holy ground.

'Tis her breathing that  
Perfumes the chamber thus :—the flame o' the taper  
Bows towards her ; and would underpeep her lids  
To see the enclosed lights ; now canopied  
Under the windows, white and azure, laced  
With blue of heaven's own tint."

Thus wandered the fancy of James Hastings—leading him, with a quickened pulse and kindled eye, into a new world. A world higher, purer, brighter, warmer, and more beautiful than the one in which he had hitherto lived!—a world up above the common earth!—nearer—oh, much nearer to God! *To see her—to be near her*—surely this is Heaven?—he thought. Yes! The heaven of love; in which pure and noble souls,—gentle and true souls,—expatiate freely, and find a happy home,—forgetful of the lets and hindrances of mortality; but learning thoroughly, in that brief space, the lesson which they can never forget—the lesson which

"That boon, life's richest treat,"

was perhaps designed by its great Giver to teach them: viz., that, in spite of all misery and shortcomings, and sin and direful change, there is in man's nature a capacity for love and happiness—a capacity for *being* good and pure, which (as God hath made nothing in vain) *must* and *will* struggle into a fitting sphere for its full and permanent exercise. I cannot think that any one who has ever known a true, passionate, yet pure love can believe that man is not made for immortal happiness. There is an earnest—a foretaste of the real perfect life in *that*, which no amount of wordy logic or balance of

moral and physical probabilities can destroy. In some moods we may say, with the sweet singer by the tomb :

“Behold; we know not anything.  
I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last—far off—at last—to all;  
And every winter change to spring.”

But in other moods a stronger faith, a brighter hope is ours, and we say boldly, “One thing we *know*—God hath made nothing in vain. Nothing—not the smallest aptitude of man’s nature—how then should its greatest be given in vain? Can the capacity for love and joy be given us merely to throw a darker gloom over the sorrows of life by a contrast with what our hearts are made to yearn for? Nay—without love of some sort—high or low—pure or impure—much or little—there is no *life* at all; and the very atmosphere love breathes is Joy!

‘Joy is the sweet voice—joy the luminous cloud—  
We in ourselves rejoice!  
And thence flows all that charms our ear or sight,  
All melodies the echoes of that voice,  
All colours a suffusion from that light.’”

You may prove the truth even in this world. Go now, my reader, and love the best things and the best men you know. Love truth and goodness with your whole soul for the space of one year, and see how near to happiness you will reach!

This is an experiment that the virtuous are always trying to make—that *is* their life! And they find the failures in that experiment, upon the whole, infinitely nobler,—ay, and more gladdening, too,—than successes in any other trial. You may read that truth written in their faces, if you have discerning eyes.

Love is an involuntary upward springing of the soul towards any manifestation of the spirit of God—either as truth, or goodness, or beauty. We may make mistakes; those who have much love in their hearts and but little judgment in their brains—who are more prone to love than discerning as to what ought to be loved—make many mistakes. We are lured by false lights—we love false appearances of good, and mourn or

the snowy Florimels of life as if they were the true beauty—we, the little-gifted and the weak. And, verily, we have our reward! We suffer; but, by God's blessing, we learn also;—by His help our weakness grows into something like strength, and our little faculties grow larger. Then, it may be late in life, comes, as a cordial to our heart, the calm and holy wisdom which Jesus, the Son of Sirach, has spoken in high poetic words:

"But Thou hast mercy upon all; for Thou canst do all things, and winkest at the sins of men because they should amend.

"For Thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing that Thou hast made: for never wouldst Thou have made anything if Thou hadst hated it. And how could anything have endured if it had not been Thy will? or be preserved if not called by Thee?

"But Thou sparest all: for they are Thine, O Lord. Thou lover of souls! For Thine incorruptible Spirit is in all things."

"And what has this to do with James Hastings and his first love?" asks some one. Much, good friend! In the dark environment which walls about our mortal life are some few portals whence the imprisoned soul looks forth, or takes flight into the great world beyond. Suddenly, when he thought not of it, the fair rose-wreathed portal of Love turned back melodiously on its golden hinges full in the face of this young man. His spirit sprang forward into the fair garden that bloomed so brightly; and, though he might not wander there, he caught glimpses through the blossoms of the everlasting hills in the distance, and knew that this garden contained a pathway leading out into immortality. Without *thinking* he *felt* that he—that the fair being before him—were immortal, and that now, for the first time, and for ever, he loved.

He stood thus with his thoughtful eyes fixed on her in whom God's incorruptible spirit shone forth so purely to him—how long he knew not. It was long enough to mature his love and impress her image on his heart for ever. Time is

but thought and emotion, and he had lived a year in those few minutes.

At length Margaret opened her eyes, and gazed, somewhat vaguely around. When she saw him she tried to smile; but he—he saw her not. Not till the large blue eyes above his sister's face turned on him, with a smile that sympathised with Margaret's, did he awake to a consciousness of all around him. Once more that rich voice came to his ear. Poor words, how he cherished them!

"She is recovering, you see."

"My dear," whispered Miss Price to the other young lady who knelt beside Margaret, and was fanning her, "don't you think we had better loosen her dress? I dare say it is tighter than she is accustomed to wear her frocks. She seems to sigh and gasp for breath sadly."

"Yes. It would be a good thing to unfasten her gown. I should have unfastened it at first if her brother had not been here."

"Dear me! I had forgotten him. He is anxious, I dare say, poor fellow. He is very fond of his sister. But he ought on no account to have come in at all!" added the old lady, with a sly smile. "What would Lady Glengarry say if she knew that a young man—and, to my thinking, a graceful and comely one—had been permitted to gaze on her fair nuns? I am a sadly negligent duenna. However, I'll send him away now." So saying, she rose, and approaching James she whispered a few words, upon hearing which he heaved a deep sigh, and looking towards the sofa once more, turned and left the room.

He was found in the lobby some time afterwards by Lord Merle, leaning against a wall, with his eyes fixed on the one opposite.

"How is Margaret?"

"Better, I believe."

"What are you doing here? You have the most extraordinary look—like a good spirit cast into outer darkness! If Margaret is not well enough to come yet, you may as well



step into our Paradise and see the houris dancing—Sophia is really perfect in a minuet!”

“Thank you—no. I’ll just inquire for Margaret again, and bring her to the ballroom if she is able to come. Don’t you stay away,—you, the heir of the house.”

“I’ll just step with you to Miss Price’s room,” said Lord Merle.

Much to his friend’s annoyance he did so. James dreaded lest other eyes should light on his discovered treasure. To his great relief no one was with Miss Price when they entered her room; it was emptied of its loveliness.

“What have you done with Margaret, Miss Price?” asked Lord Merle.

“I have sent her home. She felt so much disinclined to return to the company that I accepted the offer of some friends, who came to see me this evening, and who were going to Kensington, and undertook to convey her safely to her aunt. She went about a quarter of an hour ago.”

“I am very sorry. This is Margaret’s first ball,” said the good-natured Lord Merle; “and James and I were anxious she should enjoy it.”

James Hastings sighed.

“Don’t take things too gravely, my melancholy Jacques!” he added, laughing. “Margaret will be well enough to-morrow. Good night, Miss Price!”

James followed his friend from the room; but after he had closed the door, he suddenly recollected that he had not wished the old lady “Good night.”

“Be quick about it, then,” said Lord Merle, hastening along the lobby. “You will find me in the ball-room.”

James had no intention of doing so. He re-entered Miss Price’s room, and began to speak about Margaret; said he was in no hurry to go; preferred this charming, quiet room, etc. He walked to the open window, for the night was warm. There he saw that great part of the music-room was visible through a window, also open, which faced the one where he stood. It was almost empty now; but he observed Sir John

Fortescue, Mr. Morton, Mr. Arundel Raby, Mr. Harrington, and Sir Willoughby Morton, talking earnestly together in the middle of the room. He could not help noticing how far superior to the rest Arundel looked.

"You must have heard the singing very well from here, Miss Price," he remarked.

"Yes; it was on that account the two girls came here to-night. They persuaded me to smuggle them in to hear Catalani, and have a peep at the *beau monde*."

"Some relatives of her own, doubtless," he thought; "yet I never saw *l'air noble* in such perfection. Those two girls are of the right sort of aristocracy. Nature has given them a patent of nobility. Thank Heaven! then she is not *above* me in rank."

"Were those young ladies English?" he asked. "They wore a peculiar dress—a very picturesque and becoming one, I think."

"My dear James, it is frightful. It is because they are beautiful that you did not observe the ugliness of the dress. So plain!—so unsuited to their——" and she stopped.

"I don't think you mentioned their names?" he said, inquiringly.

"No;" and the little dry smile puckered her mouth. "I don't think I did. They are orphans, poor girls! Their mother was a pupil and dear friend of mine."

"I suppose it was they who took Margaret home?" James inquired.

"Yes. She was quite able to bear the motion of a carriage. You will go and see her in the morning?"

"Oh, yes," he replied; and taking out his watch, he observed that it was "not yet eleven o'clock."

"You had better go back to the company."

"Perhaps so. Good night, dear Miss Price! Many thanks for your attention to Maggie."

Within an hour after James Hastings left Miss Price's room, his aunt and sister were seated together in the study, at Sunny Bank. There was a fire in the grate, and they had drawn

their chairs close to it, for it was the "dead waste and middle of the night,"—and they felt chilly. Margaret was being forced to take some spiced wine by her aunt, and she held a biscuit in her hand which she pretended to eat.

"And so they really are so very beautiful?" asked Miss Hastings, in reference to something Margaret had said.

"Beautiful, aunt? Words are quite poor to express what they are! I never saw—I never could have imagined—anything so perfect, so heavenly. If I did not think that I should see them again before long, I would go and stand near their house till they came out—hire myself as a servant to them—anything for the glorious privilege of seeing such creatures. Oh, aunt, I never felt till to-night what a tremendous power beauty, in a woman, is! But how different the beauty of these exquisite, pure beings, upon whose souls the breath of this world has never passed, who seem to me transcendent in goodness and holiness, as in loveliness—and the brilliant, quite earthly, mere body-and-talent beauty of this great singer, Catalani."

"My child," said her aunt, "if you could know the early history of this Italian woman, you might, perhaps, see as much to admire in her resistance of the evil with which she has had to battle, as you see in the utter ignorance of evil in—Who can that be, ringing, at so late an hour?"

In a few minutes steps were heard in the passage.

"It is James!" said Margaret.

"I thought you would not be gone to bed," he said, shaking hands with his aunt. "I was anxious to see how Maggie— Oh, oh! Wine and biscuits! It's not a very desperate case, then."

"No. But we are just going to bed. You will sleep here, of course? Your room is always ready. Will you take anything? You look pale and exhausted."

"I am tired. I don't wish for anything except my bed. I won't detain you, aunt. I see Audrey is waiting. Here is your candle, Maggie—I will light it for you, dear." And he bade his aunt "Good night;" and half shutting the

door, he turned to his sister—"Are you really quite recovered, love?"

"Yes! but I am so tired and foolishly nervous, dear! Good night!" And she threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him affectionately.

"God bless you, Maggie! What! in tears, my darling?"

She passed her hand across her eyes. "It is nothing, James. I don't think fashionable parties quite suit me. I was glad to come home!"

"By the way, Maggie, who were those strangely dressed girls who brought you home?"

"Don't you know? They were Lady Geraldine and Lady Alice Trevor, Lord Carleton's wards."

"Oh! Good night, dear!"

And the brother and sister parted,—each conscious of a mighty change—the birth of a new passion in the soul.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Aunt, I fancy we shall have a great many visitors to-day," said Margaret, as they sat at breakfast one morning a few weeks after the ball at Raby House.

"Why do you think so, my love?" Miss Hastings had insensibly learned to love her niece, and to use gentle epithets to her, during the three years they had lived together. "Have you been dreaming dreams? or has Audrey found any *strangers* in her tea-cup this morning?"

Margaret laughed a little, but blushed a great deal. Her elegant sister, Sophia, was always horrified at Margaret's blushes. "If it were a gentle suffusion of the cheek," the former would say, "it might not be unbecoming—but to flush all over a fiery red—face, neck, arms—to the tips of your fingers—as you do, Margaret, is quite ugly and vulgar. You really should put some check upon your feelings! Poor mamma used to tell you so." Margaret felt very antagonistic to Sophia, and never pretended to have strong sisterly affection for her—but she was many years before she got over a sense of wickedness for not really loving her own sister. On the present occasion, Margaret blushed because she *had* been

dreaming that Sophia came that day and teased her with sneers and questions about her "behaviour on the night of the ball;" and had repeated, in a sisterly way, every disagreeable thing she had heard others say on the subject. Her aunt looked at her again, and said,—

"Oh, you *have* been dreaming, Maggie, if I am to judge by the silence of the tongue and the eloquence of the cheek."

"I dreamed that Sophia came—and Mrs. Harrington. After that we had a host of other people. I do not remember who,—but half a dozen at least. More than we ever have."

"It is not unlikely that your dream may come true, as it seems we are going to have a fine day. Joseph Rosemary has doffed his thick coat. He and Audrey were carrying on their flirtation in a very merry key this morning, under my window. Audrey laughs as if she were a girl," added Miss Hastings, laughing a little herself; and then suddenly setting down the cup, she leaned back in her chair, and put her hand over her heart.

"Don't be alarmed, dear! It is only one of my spasms. I have been troubled by them all night. I ought not to laugh. Laughing is good for people like you and Audrey, but not for me, you see! Why, you are as pale now as you were red a short time ago! It is passing away, I assure you. I have been subject to these spasms of the heart several years now."

"But are they not dangerous, dear aunt?" asked Margaret anxiously.

"No, my dear; I believe not. But diseases of the heart and of the circulation of the blood are not much understood. The quiet life I lead is very favourable to my health, you know. I have no excitements, no disquietudes, and the tenderest attentions from my dear niece;" and she stroked Margaret's fair hair, as she knelt beside her. "I was thinking this morning, in the midst of my pain, as I heard Audrey laughing with Joseph, how full of blessings my life is!—Those two faithful servants love me heartily. Such love alone would make my life far happier than that of many who, as our new

poet says, 'Have none to love them—none whom they can love.' (*That*, by the way, Margaret, must be their own fault!) But when I think of the three happy years we have spent together—of the joy you have added to my life, by your improvement, intellectual and moral,—by your genuine sympathy with my chief study, and by your equally genuine affection for me,—when I think of this, Margaret, I cannot dwell on the idea of losing such a blessing!"

"But why think of it, dear aunt?" inquired Maggie, tenderly embracing her. "Has my father written for me?"

"No, no, my dear!" said Miss Hastings. She sighed, and kissed Margaret's cheek. She did not add the rest of the reply—though it was in her mind. "Your father has not sent for you, but my heavenly Father has sent for me."

They sat in silence for some minutes. Presently Miss Hastings said, "Ring for them to take away these things. We will not do any work this morning. I feel as if I wanted a holiday after my bad night. You shall bring me my knitting, and come and read the first volume of 'Waverley' aloud."

Margaret sprang up delightedly. "Ah! that will be better than your dictating the account of poor John Davenant's case for Dr. —. That can be done to-morrow, when you are better. It is perfectly charming to see how this wonderful romance has bewitched *you*, as well as all the rest of us. Never tell me you don't care for fiction again! It is only three weeks since 'Waverley' was published, and this is the fourth time of reading it. Bravo, my scientific aunt!"

"Is it only three weeks since 'Waverley' was published?"

"Just three weeks. You remember, it came to you the day after the publication."

"Oh, yes. Arundel brought it to amuse me, saying he had read it through without stopping; and I remember somebody that was going to a grand entertainment at Raby House the day after that, and who was so madly absorbed in the new book, that she could not begin to dress till she had finished it.

I think that young lady kept certain friends waiting an hour for her."

Margaret laughed. "Aunt, pray remember to forget that circumstance when you talk to Sophia about my numerous faults. She would never forgive me if she suspected what it was that kept me so long that evening. 'Ah! if I live to be as old as old Parr, I shall never forget my first reading of 'Waverley'! There I sat beside you all day, on that very same stool, and never once tired of reading aloud. Let us try it again to-day. aunt. Perhaps the pleasure will come back."

Margaret paused, and stooped to pick up one of her aunt's flowers, and placed it in her lap, whilst she impressed a kiss on her forehead. There was a tremulousness in the kiss which made her aunt look up at Margaret's eyes, to see what comment they made on the lips. She saw something there which awoke a new anxiety; but she was too experienced and too tender to say a word to her niece about it.

"Go, my child, and give your orders for the day to the servants, and then fetch the magic book, and transport us to sixty years since."

Margaret left the room.

"I wonder what happened at Raby House that night to change my niece so much!" thought the maiden aunt, as she watched her retreating form. "Is it the dawn of that passion which makes or mars a woman's happiness? Poor child! God shield *her* from the storm, and grant her the sunshine. But she is so young, so active-minded, and with a heart filled to overflowing with the calm affections of early years. Love will not find her so easy a victim as he found me. Yet, Lord Merle and his brother are very fitting objects to awaken love in a young girl's breast. She has seen too much of them. She is scarcely aware, I fear, of the difference that rank will make between them now."

By the time Margaret returned with the book, her aunt was in the midst of a painful train of thought. The young girl saw it—saw the inquiring glance at herself—and dreading

instinctively the questions which might ensue, she assumed a gay manner, and said :

"Now, my good aunt, here is a great wizard come to dispel the cloud from your brow. Take up your knitting, and yield yourself to the incantation."

For the first half hour of the lecture neither reader nor listener forgot herself and her own feelings. After that, the charm worked completely, and they were so deeply engaged with the Baron of Bradwardine at Tully Veolan, that they were deaf to the ringing of the gate-bell, and to the subsequent approach of visitors, until they passed in front of the open window.

"Lady Fortescue and Mr. Morton, aunt!" exclaimed Margaret, in a tone of extreme vexation mingled with surprise. "I don't like her (she's such a bad imitation of poor Lady Carleton!), and I can't bear that man! It makes me feel angry to look at him. I need not stay—need I? I can go out at the window without meeting them."

"You had better stay in the room for a short time, my love!" said her aunt; "then you can slip through the window, and take a turn in the garden till they go."

Margaret sat down again, and the visitors were ushered in.

They were very nearly strangers to Miss Hastings, and her manner of receiving them showed plainly enough that she was not anxious to promote a greater degree of intimacy. Margaret thought that no one had the power of keeping people at the exact distance which suited her own wishes so well as her aunt.

Lady Fortescue began in her usual lively, easy manner. "I have intended to call on you, my dear madam, every day for the past month. I think you knew my sister, Lady Carleton well. We often heard Lord Carleton speak of the Hastings family when we were children. He used to spend his holidays with you, sometimes. Don't you remember, Henry, Frederick always gave us such glowing accounts of Harry Hastings and his family?"

"Yes," said Mr. Morton, addressing Miss Hastings; "I have a very lively recollection of the way in which you were all held



up as patterns to us. Your brother, the present rector of Carleton, was with Frederick and me at Eton."

"I have heard him say that he knew Mr. Henry Morton very well," replied Miss Hastings. She then turned to the lady, with a look which said as plainly as look could say,— "*Et puis ?* These are no new facts. To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit and these reminiscences ?"

Lady Fortescue was not prepared to find "the old maid who never went into society" so perfectly self-possessed—so unimpressed by the honour of a visit from a leader of *ton*. She began to fancy that she should fail in the objects of her visit. "She is not a person to be managed very easily," thought the clever little woman. "I wonder how it is that I can't get on with her."

"Ever since I had the pleasure of meeting your nieces at Raby House, the other evening, I have felt a strong desire to make your acquaintance, Miss Hastings," said Lady Fortescue. "Mrs. Russell is making quite a sensation, I assure you. Every one admires her."

"She is a very pretty young woman," remarked Miss Hastings. "She admires the fashionable world very much, and the fashionable world, in return, admires her. It is not an uncommon reciprocity."

Mr. Morton here tried to improve matters by speaking to Margaret. "I observed the other night that you are very fond of music, and have been well taught. You must have had a first-rate instructor. From what professor did you learn ?"

"From no professor. Your sister, Lady Carleton, taught me."

"Indeed ! She taught Arundel, too. You learned together, perhaps."

What would Margaret have given to be able to suppress the blush which stole over her every visible atom of skin as she replied :

"Yes, sometimes."

Mr. Morton looked curiously for a moment at the downcast

eyes and crimson cheek. "She is much younger than I fancied. Naïve and innocent à *faire rire*. Strange mixture! But she can be easily pumped, that's clear."

"Have you wept for the loss of Catalani?" he said, aloud.

"Ah!" interrupted Lady Fortescue, "I hear you have got Miss Margaret Hastings on the subject of music; and that brings me to the secondary object of my visit. I am going to get up a musical entertainment in a small way. My nephew Merle is managing the thing. His brother is quite a musician, and has promised to sing; and my eldest girl is a prodigious fine singer. But they say they cannot get on without a contralto. As my Mira is to take a part, I object to having any professional persons engaged; and they have been searching their whole acquaintance for a good contralto. My nephew Merle said yesterday that Miss Margaret Hastings' voice is a charming contralto, and that she would be in every way an acquisition to our *corps opératique*. So I promised the young people to call on you, my dear madam, and beg you to allow your niece, if she will favour us, to give us her valuable assistance."

As Miss Hastings did not seem highly charmed with this invitation, and Margaret's face wore not an ecstatic expression, Lady Fortescue began to think that the sop she had brought for Cerberus would not be so palatable as she expected. "If they do not jump at this offer, which most of the girls in London would be but too happy to accept, how shall I get on with my other business?" However, she went on working at this.

"You need not fear that you will be among strangers, my dear!" she said, turning kindly to Margaret. "We shall have your own sister and Mrs. Harrington and her brother, besides my two nephews. A little crowd of old acquaintances, in short. And I think I can promise you some new acquaintances whom you will like. In the first place, there is my Mira, and then there are the two persons for whose entertainment we first thought of getting up the opera at all. You have never seen *them*—no one has seen them yet; they have

been living in the strictest retirement, and are not to be brought out till next year—when Lord Carleton takes the guardianship of them; and then, of course, all the trouble of introducing them will fall upon me.”

“And some of the glory, too!” interposed her brother. “The Ladies Trevor are very handsome girls, but so much is said about them now, that I fear there will be some disappointment when their veritable forms appear in the world.”

“Impossible!” exclaimed his sister, with enthusiasm. “They are so beautiful that it is impossible to exaggerate in speaking of them.”

The door was thrown open at this moment, and Mrs. Russell, Mrs. Harrington, and Mr. William Grey were announced. After the usual greetings and some ill-concealed surprise on Carlotta’s part at the sight of Lady Fortescue and her brother, every one took a seat—Brutus having accommodated himself with the smallest and most uncomfortable chair in the room, which happened to be near Margaret.

“As I was saying, Miss Hastings,” continued Lady Fortescue, “Lady Alice and Lady Geraldine are the most beautiful girls I ever saw. But you know my brother-in-law’s affairs so well, you have probably seen his wards.”

“Pardon me,” said Miss Hastings, “I know your brother-in-law’s affairs so ill that I have scarcely heard that he has any wards. I am quite ignorant of what goes on in the fashionable world. The fame of these young ladies has not reached my retirement.”

“Well parried!” thought Mr. Morton.

“How strange! I fancied you and Mr. Hastings were quite in his confidence.”

“Lord Carleton can’t be going to marry her, if she does not *know* about the Trevor girls!” thought Lady Fortescue. “Besides, she is so calm and easy. I thought it *must* be a mistake—yet John and Henry seemed certain about it. Now I see her plainly, the idea is preposterous. She is very *distingué*-looking, I grant—and must have been handsome; but

what man in Carleton's position would think of marrying a woman of her age?—who looks as if she were dying, too. A woman without name, fame, fortune, youth, or beauty. It is quite absurd. John may say what he likes about 'the boy being father to the man,' and Carleton's natural character being romantic, and his disease a poetic insanity. He was just the person to *faire des folies* when a boy, but he is the last person to do an irrational thing now. Marry this grave, sickly old maid, from a sentimental recollection of his fancy for her! It is just as likely that Henry should cry 'All for love, or the world well lost.'" These thoughts passed through Lady Fortescue's brain, and she had reached this conclusion when Miss Hastings addressed her.

"Are these young ladies the daughters of the late Duke of Alderney? And is Lord Carleton their guardian?"

"Did you not know all about that, aunt?" asked Mrs. Russell. "They have been living with Lady Glengarry ever since their father's death."

"Yes," added Mrs. Harrington; "and it is reported that she is so fond and proud of them that she can't bear to give them up to Lord Carleton, as, by the duke's will, she ought to do this very summer. She has come to London on purpose to persuade the earl to let her keep them out of the wicked world yet a little longer. She is an awfully pious woman, and they are reported to be young saints."

"At all events they are as beautiful as any of Rafaele's," said Mr. Morton, casting his eyes on a fine copy of a St. Catharine by that artist, which Arundel had brought with him from Germany for Miss Hastings.

"How do you know, Mr. Morton? Have you seen them?" inquired Sophia, who was an interested party when female beauty was under discussion.

"I have seen them. I saw them yesterday. I am going to see them again to-day."

"What! are they in London? Does not Lady Glengarry fear that the very atmosphere of London will taint their purity?" asked Carlotta, laughing.

"I suppose it was on that account that she established them and herself at Kensington," he replied.

Mrs. Harrington and Mrs. Russell immediately attacked him with questions concerning the invisible beauties, and while he was answering them, Lady Fortescue drew her chair closer to Miss Hastings, and lowering her voice, began to execute the most important business for which she had made this visit—viz., to ascertain, if possible, whether her sister had left the North Ashurst property, *unconditionally*, to her second son. Now, the little woman herself cared nothing about the matter, but Henry was especially anxious to know this fact, as there were two boroughs on the estates, each of which returned two members to Parliament; and if Mr. Arundel Raby became sole possessor of such valuable property at the end of another year, it seemed to him that no time should be lost in letting the fact be promulgated among his party in order that they might pay honour where honour was due.

"My dear Miss Hastings," she began, "I was in Dublin, you may remember, at the time when poor Caroline died, and wretched enough I was not to be with her at the last; for I know she had many things she wished to consult me about, especially concerning her two dear boys. You were sent for at her death, I heard."

"I was," said Miss Hastings. "Hers was not a painful death. She passed away peaceably in her husband's arms, with her two children before her. She was happy then. She had been long prepared for death." And Miss Hastings looked as if she were recalling that scene.

Lady Fortescue found herself insensibly picturing that subject to her mind; and during the silence that ensued, the voluble Carlotta, and the cool mocking tones of Mr. Morton, might be heard on the one side, and Mr. William Grey's semi-articulate sentences addressed in a growling whisper to Margaret, on the other.

"What's that book you have in your hand, Miss Margaret?" he asked, trying hard to sit on the small chair.

"The famous new book—'Waverley.' "

"I guessed as much!—it's my usual luck! Of course somebody else thought of it before I did! I'm still very slow, Miss Margaret." He looked much annoyed, and a something between a sigh and a grunt escaped him.

"What is the matter?" asked Margaret, smiling faintly, and trying to attend to what he said, for her thoughts were far off, meditating on the loveliness of Lord Carleton's wards. "What is the matter? Have you been slow to read this book?"

"Oh, I never thought of reading it *myself*!" he replied hastily. "Books are not much in my line. But everybody is talking about this, and saying it's the cleverest book ever written; and it came into my head yesterday that *you* would be sure to like it, so I got it for you, and here it is." Saying which he thrust his great hand into a side-pocket, and brought out at a grasp the three little volumes—so precious in their day. "I suppose you don't want this, now that you have another copy?"

"But this is not mine, it is my aunt's," said Margaret, touched by the kind thought of her old friend—for it *was* a kind thought which had prompted him to gratify a taste with which he had not the slightest sympathy.

Brutus brightened at the words. "Then, perhaps, you have *not* got one of your own?"

"No; and I shall be very glad to accept this from you," said Margaret, looking kindly at him. "You could give me nothing I like better."

"That's very kind of you to say so! You always were very kind." And he ventured to look at the honest, brown eyes, which he thought more beautiful than any book. There was a touch of drollery in their expression, as Margaret returned his glance, and said,—

"As all the world is talking about this book, would it not be as well for you to know what the story is?"

"Ah! if you would *tell* me the story as you used to tell stories to poor Naldo and me years ago! I shall never forget

your telling us about 'Sindbad,' and 'Peter Wilkins.' I never cared for the stories in the book half as well. I wish those times would come again!"

Margaret replied cheerfully, "I begin to want to know what is to happen to myself and everybody I care for. My story-telling days are over now. I want to *live* a story. Don't you?"

"I don't know," replied Mr. William Grey. "I don't think my story would be very interesting; but perhaps *yours* will be. As good as 'Cinderella,' or 'Snowdrop,' or 'Beauty and the Beast,' or some of those queer tales that Naldo was never tired of hearing. It's pleasant to talk of those old times to you. But, bless me! I was forgetting I had something else to speak about. Carlotta is making such a row with Mr. Morton, and Lady Fortescue seems as if she wanted to talk secrets with your aunt—don't you think you and I might go into the garden? It looks very pretty."

Margaret was pleased with his proposal, for she longed to be out in the sunshine, and unconscious that she was affording her sister a capital subject for a lecture on "the strange indecorum of her behaviour to gentlemen" (which was subsequently administered), she rose and walked off quietly into the garden with Mr. William Grey.

Miss Hastings observed their departure, and thought them very wise; she longed to be out there herself. But Lady Fortescue and a continually increasing pain in her side forbade.

"The thought of poor Caroline's death makes me quite melancholy!" said Lady Fortescue. "By the way,—is it true that she died before she gave her last directions to the lawyer?"

"It is true."

"Then she left no will?"

"No legal document; but she left her last will in a letter to her husband."

"Do you know the particulars of it? I ask from motives of affection. You know I am much interested in my nephew."

"Lord Carleton himself could best satisfy your curiosity," replied Miss Hastings.

"Ah! I see you do *not* know my brother-in-law. There never was any man more reserved in family matters. It is impossible to get him to speak about these things. He keeps them strictly to himself."

"Then, do you not think it is becoming in those who, by chance or designedly, are acquainted with these family matters, to keep them strictly to themselves also?" And Miss Hastings could not refrain from smiling at the very small talent for diplomacy exercised by Lady Fortescue on this occasion. The latter bit her pretty lip, and said,—

"Oh! of course." She had "spoken unthinkingly," and "had no motive but interest in her dear nephew's affairs." Poor Lady Fortescue! If her feelings had not been roused by speaking of her sister, she certainly would never have acquitted herself so ill; but had she used all the skill she possessed, it would not have elicited the information she required from Miss Hastings; because Miss Hastings acted upon principle, and had made it a rule *not* to speak on the subject which excited her present visitor's curiosity, except in a general way; stating nothing more than she was well aware must be known by every servant in the Raby family, and had been talked of all over London. Beaten back on her main point, Lady Fortescue returned to the secondary matter. "You will, I hope, have no objection to allowing your niece to join my musical party?"

"I am sorry to refuse, but I see that my niece would not like such a public exhibition of her incompetence. Besides, she has not voice enough yet. It is just a delusion of Lord Merle's! I can, however, supply her place, if you are really anxious for a good contralto, and an unprofessional young lady. Our vicar's daughter—my friend, is quite an artist. Lord Merle and his brother know her, and what she can do. She would really enjoy it. I will give you a line of introduction. You can call this morning."

"But," said Lady Fortescue, "won't they think it strange? Never to have been in their house before!"

"You never were in *my* house before to-day, you know,"



said Miss Hastings, smiling. "There is always an understood motive for every first visit."

Mr. Morton began to look with uneasiness on the future Lady Carleton.

Very soon after, Margaret and Mr. William Grey reappeared, and all the visitors took leave. Margaret, who was of the old-fashioned school of young ladies, accompanied her aunt's guests to the gate, and saw the carriages drive off. On her return, she found Miss Hastings leaning back in her chair, pale and exhausted.

"These visitors have fatigued you, my dear aunt; I ought to have helped to talk with them! It was very selfish to go away as I did!"

"Not at all, my dear. Give me your arm. I think a sight of the garden will do me good," said Miss Hastings, turning her eyes longingly towards the blue sky. Margaret ran to fetch a shawl, and put it carefully round her aunt. They were silent till they came to the pretty jessamine arbour, which was Miss Hastings' favourite retreat.

"I must sit down here, my dear. Walking brings on the pain in my side. There! that is very pleasant. The house looks so pretty from here, and so does the little stream. How placid, how enviably happy Bess and Strawberry are!"

"Yes, indeed!" replied Margaret. "I sometimes think I should like to be a good cow."

"That must be when you are a bad girl, and forget the dignity of humanity," said her aunt, smiling. "Tell me, dear, was I right in supposing you do not wish to sing at this party of Lady Fortescue's?"

"Quite right, aunt. I don't know the music. It is far too difficult; and besides, my voice is not at all settled."

"Would you like to go to the party as a listener?"

"No, aunt. I do not wish to go at all. I don't like the Fortescues. Besides, I am tired of these grand aristocratic parties. Our own quiet evenings here suit me best—and these delicious sunny mornings. Did you say any more to Lady Fortescue on the subject?"

"Yes; I declined the invitation for you."

"Not a very flattering one, aunt! They could find no better contralto among their acquaintance, and so Lord Merle and Arundel proposed that *I* should be asked," said Margaret, flushing rosy red. Then, as if to hide a feeling of indignation, she began to laugh. "Oh, that dear, queer Brutus! I *must* tell you two things about him that are quite traits of character." She then related the little incident of the presentation of "Waverley." "Was it not nice of him, aunt? But now I must tell you something he told me when we were walking in the garden."

"Stop, my dear! There is some visitor at the gate. I hear a ring. Go and tell them to say I can see nobody." Margaret began to run towards the gate (which was visible from the bower), in order to waylay the servant, but she was too late. Sunny Bank not being an aristocratic domain, the servants were apt to do each other's work if it came in their way. And though it was not Joseph Rosemary's "place" to open the gate to visitors, yet, as he happened to be near it when the bell was rung, it seemed to him a matter of course that he should open it. He did so, and admitted two gentlemen, before Margaret could reach him. They were Arundel and his father.

The latter spoke to her immediately—"How do you do, my dear?" But his eyes were wandering round the place eagerly, and he said no more, until she had exchanged greetings with his son;—not a very equal exchange, be it said;—for Arundel's was affectionate and cordial, hers was constrained, and rather distant.

"Is your aunt at home, my dear?" asked Lord Carleton, measuring with his eye a fine acacia on the lawn, and comparing it with his recollection of the same tree, twenty-five years before.

"Yes; but she is so unwell, that——"

"Indeed!" interrupted Lord Carleton. "I am sorry to hear that! Is she confined to her room—or, can she see me?"

"She is not in her room, my lord; she is in that arbour, yonder."

"Ah! the old jessamine bower!" He knew it well; for with his own young hands he had made that bower and planted the jessamine on the eighteenth birthday of the woman who now sat within its luxuriant shade, and watched him approaching. Why are her hands clasped so nervously? why does the heart within her beat audibly, and send the blood once more like lightning through her veins? Why is this? Is she not a calm, sensible woman, in the autumn of her days? What means this stirring of the spring-time within her bosom? She is astonished at her own emotion. "I did not know I could feel *so* any more. I thought it was all gone—all dead. Cannot I see him without recalling the long-forgotten past? Surely there is something unnatural in my sensations this day! All nature impresses my spirit more vividly than usual. Thought and feeling are as acute and brilliant as if I were young again. Is it the sudden leaping up of the flame before the lamp is extinguished?"

The last question still lingered in her mind as Lord Carleton ascended the grassy mound on which stood the bower—its entrance curtained by the waving dark-green leaves. He came alone, having said to Margaret and his son,—

"My dear children, I wish to speak to Miss Hastings on business. I will go to her, and you can amuse yourselves. It seems but the other day that I was as young and as free from care as you!"

Lord Carleton had forgotten the cares of youth—its immense capacity for suffering; he remembered only its pleasures. Arundel looked at his father with a darkened countenance.

"They are going to talk about *me*," he thought. "He will never understand me!"—Arundel was right. His father had come to Sunny Bank to talk with Miss Hastings about plans for guiding his son in the way he wished him to go. During the last few months he had frequently consulted Miss Hastings about his son's strange conduct at Bonn. He had

sent him thither after receiving private intimation from some Oxford authorities of the unorthodox opinions publicly maintained by his son. To prevent the scandal of expulsion from the bosom of that venerable *Alma Mater*, Arundel was summoned thence, and at his own request transferred to Bonn.

Instead of remaining with the Herr Professor Weisenase, the youth took to rambling all over Germany with his fellow-students, or oftener alone. He cultivated the acquaintance of mere dreamers, philosophers, artists, and men of letters; hunted out remarkable geniuses in garrets and hovels; scattered his English gold and his youthful enthusiasm wherever he went, leaving the perfume of a good name behind him—a name for purity of heart and conduct—for uncommon genius—for a certain something that made the heart beat warmly, and the tongue become eloquent, whenever the *junge Engländer* was mentioned. He knew not the effect he produced on the great celebrities, world-worried and world-weary, whom he came to worship and—if they would let him—to love. The most inaccessible, the most morose, softened before the gentle fire, the pure loving breath of that young genius.

The rugged, melancholy Beethoven was won to smiles at their first interview—and wept at their last. “If he had not been an English lord, he might have been a great composer,” was said of our Arundel by that grandest musical genius of our century. Goethe seemed to be moved by his presence as by an embodiment of his own idea of youth—or what youth will be in some far-advanced stage of humanity. Schiller, alas! was dead when Arundel visited Weimar. With Jean Paul, *der Einsiger*, the beautiful and impassioned young man who drew with such inimitable humour the reverse of the medal in honour of the English nation, which he struck on the occasion of their first meeting—with him, he was at once an idol, and a younger, perhaps less gifted, but better trained brother. With Fichte, the large-hearted philosopher and politician, the son of the sea-girt isle of Liberty—aristocratic by birth as he was—was a favourite; and what was more, a companion, to whom he discoursed on the deepest mysteries

of divine philosophy, and found himself *understood*; and from that fresh and original mind, nurtured as it had been in a sphere so different from that in which his own youth had expanded, the builder of noble and beautiful hopes for man's future career on earth received new impulse and invigorated faith in his own theories.

All the great men were tolerant of his errors; even Goethe loved to hear the youth expatiate on the democratic principle, while his eye and ear were thoroughly satisfied with the effect of the aristocratic principle as exemplified in the case of the noble speaker. Thus, instead of "poring over melancholy books" in a university, Arundel Raby was living face to face with some of the greatest men of the day.

"He is trying his powers; discovering the work which he is best able to perform. Let him alone. Attempt to interfere with the natural working of his mind, and I cannot answer for the result," said Miss Hastings.

"But what will be the result if we do *not* interfere?" asked his father. "He will be utterly unfit to occupy his true place in society. An English landed proprietor must not be a cosmopolite and a *dilettante*."

"Do not fear! Arundel is very young. Would you rather that his departures from the *juste milieu* which maturity clings to, that his irregularities should be what they are, than like those of other young men?"

Lord Carleton looked grave. His son Merle, the pride of his heart, was certainly more moral than the generality of young men of his rank; but his extravagance occasionally displeased his father. But he had more sympathy with the errors of this son, because they were looked upon as venial by the world, than he had with the errors of the other—errors, which the world could never tolerate, because they were directed against its dearest, deepest vices.

"Tell me," urged the steady advocate, "would you rather see Arundel what he is, than one of the ordinary sowers of wild oats, whom society smiles on?—forgetting that as they sow so shall they reap, though the harvest be far off."

"I know not," replied the father, "which is the worst—the dissipation of the intellect or of the senses. In Arundel's case, I fear the former is the worst. I have grave doubts whether he will ever become more than a half inspired fool. You, yourself, who have studied his mental and physical constitution more than I have had time to do,—you say that through life he will be liable to attacks of—of—*insanity*. I need not cheat myself with softened words. He knows it, and that knowledge is almost sufficient to unhinge the mind."

"It has not done so in other cases,—in *your own*," said Miss Hastings, gravely. "Believe me, it will not do so in Arundel's. I warn you. Do not let him suspect you doubt his sanity; above all, do not act on such a doubt, and lay restrictions on his free agency."

At length Lord Carleton had letters from François de Merville, his son's companion, which caused him to seek Miss Hastings again.

"He is studying night and day theology and metaphysics—he is restless—sleepless—regardless of all external things!—François cannot persuade him to leave his study or to see any one."

"I, too, have had a letter from M. de Merville," she replied. "You must exercise your parental authority, and recall him immediately. He may fall ill in a strange land. Write to him kindly—say that you want him here. When he is here, give him some active work to do, either on your estates or those that will be his."

"I should be glad of his help in public matters—perhaps *that* would carry him soonest out of his sombre speculations. However, he shall return."

He did return; and was present, as the reader knows, at the fine entertainment already mentioned. The journey, the change, the thousand occupations which his father contrived for him, completely dissipated the dark theological mists which were beginning to bewilder his artistic spirit.

He and his father conversed frequently upon the greatest questions—political and social. Lord Carleton had encour-

raged him to *speck out*, by every means except the most effectual—sympathy, which he could not make use of; and the next most effectual—strong opposition, which he dared not make use of, lest his son's brain should not be able to bear it.

Troubled at heart and sorely perplexed, he now came again to consult with his old friend, Miss Hastings; and, as he pulled the bell, the object of his solicitude approached the gate from another direction.

They entered the garden together, and parted, as has been described.

## CHAPTER XII.

### FATHER AND SON—AUNT AND NIECE.

"Yet less of sorrow lives in me  
For days of happy commune fled,  
Less yearning for the friendship dead  
Than some strong bond that is to be." *In Memoriam.*

—"Art thou not void of guile,  
A lovely soul formed to be blest and bless?  
A well of sealed and secret happiness,  
Whose waters like blithe light and music are,  
Vanquishing dissonance and gloom? A star  
Which moves not in the moving Heavens alone?  
A smile amid dark frowns? A gentle tone  
Amid rude voices?" *Epipsychidion.*

By the time Lord Carleton had lifted the curtain of tangled wreaths which veiled the entrance of the bower, Miss Hastings had recovered her usual calmness of manner. She held out her hand with the seriousness, almost amounting to solemnity, which always characterized her greeting of Lord Carleton; she never smiled or affected indifference when they met; she was above all small womanly deceits, and would not belie the feeling which the sight of him always produced in her.

She was of a sallow complexion generally, but Lord Carleton thought there was something almost deathly in her hue as he took his seat beside her.

"Your niece told me you were unwell. You are very pale to-day!" he said, looking kindly at her.

"Paler than usual am I? I dare say the greenish light which struggles into this place has something to do with it. Are *you* well? And your sons? I saw Arundel come in with you."

"We are all well," he replied; "at least physically. Ah! I remember when we selected this spot for a bower!" he exclaimed, half to himself. "That shrubbery has grown out of all memory; the house is mantled with creepers now; the acacia, the two elms, and even the slow-growing arbor vitæ there, on the lawn, have improved wonderfully in a quarter of a century. Those things are longer lived than we."

"And lower lived. There is nothing to envy in *their* state!" said Miss Hastings.

"No? Not even their passionless repose?—which seems so like that of conscious existence? Well, well! This garden is young still; but we who were not born when it was made, we are growing old. Margaret, a thought has been gathering strength in my mind lately; will you listen to it? I need not ask; you have never refused to hear me; you will not, after I have spoken my thought, even though it should not please you."

"It is not whether it please or displease me, but whether it be right or wrong, that is the question, I suppose," said Miss Hastings.

"Still as full of moral principle as ever!" he said, smiling somewhat bitterly.

"Did you expect to find me changed this morning?"

"Nay; but I may have had a faint hope that old times and old feelings were not quite forgotten; and that when you and I sit on this seat together, marked with our entwined initials—(see! *they* are not yet quite effaced, Margaret)—I may have had a faint hope that you would listen to what I am about to say, with something of the woman, and nothing of the moralist. You were not always so purely rational, Margaret."

She looked at him for a moment, steadfastly; and then,



turning away her eyes, gazed in the distance while Lord Carleton went on.

"You know, from my letter on the subject, my position with regard to these daughters of my old friend. In a few months they are to be under my roof. They need a wise female governance, for hitherto they have had an eccentric, puritanic, and, perhaps, a foolish one. They must be brought out in the world in a manner befitting their rank and fortune. I have no wife—no sister. Lady Fortescue is not the woman I would entrust with the charge of these girls, even if she could be spared from her own family to attend to mine. Miss Price is too old; besides, she is but a governess. What must I do for my wards?"

"You must marry again," said Miss Hastings, quietly, but without looking at him. "Was that your thought?"

"It was. Is the thought right or wrong?"

"Men are not wont to be guided by the opinion of others in such matters," replied Miss Hastings, closing her eyes for a moment, and placing her hand on her side. Lord Carleton did not observe the movement, so indicative of sharp physical pain, and went on with what he had to say.

"Yes, I think I must marry again!—Caroline foresaw that circumstances might render such a step desirable for me; and two days before her death she wrote a letter on this subject, which she enjoined me not to open until a year after her death. When I *did* open it, I understood better than I had ever done before the enduring and unselfish nature of that woman's love! Love was all in all with her; every faculty was made subordinate to her love as wife and mother."

"Happy woman!" murmured Miss Hastings.

"Nay; I would to God she had been *happy*!—above all, that I had not been the instrument of her unhappiness! Sweet Caroline! gentle, loving, self-sacrificing,—prematurely killed by brooding over the ills that encompassed those she loved! No! she was not happy; and that thought haunts me like the memory of a crime."

Miss Hastings turned towards her agitated friend. "Do

not reproach yourself too much. She was happy as your wife—she loved you! There was no reason why she should not stretch a hand across the grave to aid you in your earthly course. She was one of the most generous, most amiable beings I ever knew. You will not have a second wife like her.”

“Like her! There are none like her. Few women are capable of such love. No; I do not, at my present age, seek a renewal of that blessing of my manhood. With Caroline I buried all love for woman. I think *you* know this! But perhaps you do not know how thoroughly both Caroline and I understood and appreciated *your* character.”

A momentary elevation of the eyebrows was all the reply which Miss Hastings made to this; but she listened attentively, with slightly compressed lips, as if she suffered pain,—whether mental or physical it would have been difficult to decide. He continued—

“She knew of our early girl and boy attachment, and gave me credit for my taste—and for my constancy, too.” And he smiled. “Now that the feeling has quite gone, I can speak to you openly on the subject. You, with your quiet, passionless nature, will scarcely credit it perhaps; but my love for you, or, rather, for my own imagination of you, as a girl, lasted till after my marriage. What absurd mistakes about character we make when we are boys! I used to think *you* were of a passionate, loving nature—that your heart controlled your intellect, and would force it to minister to its demands. In short, I fancied *you* were what I found Caroline to be. It was long before I read your true character in your conduct. A noble, lofty character—loving work and science for their own sakes, and for the sake of the general good—as unselfish in your universal benevolence as Caroline in her particular affection. She used to say that you were the most unselfish person she knew.

“There is no one on earth, except my boys, for whom I entertain so strong an affection as for you, Margaret. I respect and reverence you for your intellect and your steady

adherence to principle. I am bound to you by gratitude as a father—by the memory of my early love—although it was mistaken, and *you* never loved me, as I once fancied. You, with your calm nature, discovered your error soon enough not to suffer much from it. Was it not so, my friend?"

"I never deceived *myself* on that point!" she replied faintly, finding that he waited for an answer.

"No matter. Whether you were loving or loveless in those past days, you and I can never be wholly indifferent to each other, Margaret."

"Never!—neither here nor beyond the grave!" she said quickly, and as if the words were forced from her.

Lord Carleton's manner became warmer.

"God bless you, my friend! There was something like affection in those words—something which makes me hope you will let me add to your happiness by enabling you to exercise your benevolence in a larger sphere than you have hitherto done. Something that makes me almost sure my Caroline's wish was prophetic, and that you will consent to become the second Lady Carleton—rule my household—be a mother to my boys—and the best and wisest friend to one who tells you candidly that he has no *love* to give. Will you be my wife, now, Margaret? You refused me once, twice, thrice. We were young then, and we loved—at least, *I* loved. We are growing old now! Shall we grow old together, Margaret?" He had taken her hand. She returned the pressure of his, and looked at him with a strange expression.

"What is this? You are ill? I have been thoughtless to enter on this matter now! Let me lead you to the house," he said, with alarm.

"Stay!—one moment!—it will keep off one moment!"—she spoke in a gasping, broken voice, and with a strong effort to master some physical pang. "Listen!—you do not know me!—my life!—you are wrong! all wrong!—Frederick! Be your wife?—not the wife of *your love*—the head housekeeper—care for your sons—your wards—talk with you when you are in the mood—I would even degrade myself to serve you

thus—because—ah! God! he has *not* known it! But there is another obstacle now! Again, I cannot be your wife.”

“What is this? Calm yourself, my dear friend! Margaret! What is the matter?” he exclaimed, much alarmed at her excited manner. “Say, in one word, what obstacle there is.”

“Another time—I—I——” and overcome with acute pain, she fell back insensible. Lord Carleton carried her across the lawn to the house, and laid her on a sofa, in the first room he came to. Seeing no one about, he rang the bell violently, and gazed with mingled pity and wonder at the emaciated form he remembered so well adorned with all the graces of youth and the imagination of a lover. There was nothing there, now, that he could call beautiful.

“Ah! if she had lived in the affections instead of in the intellect,” he thought, “she would have been beautiful and amiable, now! Surely her life has been a mistake! What did she mean just now? Not *know* her? How can I be wrong?”

Audrey entered the room hastily, and expressed serious fear at the condition of her mistress. “This is the third fit in two days. They are quite dangerous! She ought to be bled, she told me. I’ve no one to send for the surgeon—they’re all away, and I can’t leave her, poor dear!”

“Tell me his address, and I will go for him directly.”

“You are very condescending, my lord!”

“Condescending! my good woman—don’t talk nonsense! Where does the man live?”

Audrey immediately gave the address of a neighbouring surgeon, and Lord Carleton started off, almost with the speed of a boy. Poor Audrey was too absorbed in grief for the illness of her mistress to think about Lord Carleton or any one else, as she knelt down to rub the cold hands.

An unusual silence—the silence of mid-day in the full summer-time, reigned through the house and garden. All the doors and windows were open, but no sound of bird or insect was on the creeping breeze. There was a death-like

stillness—a sort of “tingling silentness” over all nature. Suddenly, from a distant room, rose the sound of two young voices singing a solemn, heart-thrilling strain. To Audrey’s simple mind it was as if angels were singing a heavenly hymn, calling her mistress to join them—and she sobbed aloud as the slow, sweet melody proceeded. “Bless their young hearts! they don’t know what is going to happen! Ah! let them sing while they can. Their singing days will be over soon enough, I dare say! And she’ll be in her grave then.”

\* \* \* \* \*

While the father and the aunt conversed as we have related above, what were the son and the niece doing?

They walked together round that sweet garden, saying little except, perhaps, a word or half exclamation of delight in the beauty of tree, or flower, or passing effect of light or shadow. “Is it not lovely? Oh, see! Beautiful!” So much of sympathy was between them that a look, a gesture, was generally enough. There was something in the mere presence of Arundel Raby that made all low-thoughted care, selfish sorrow, resentment, and apprehension pass away from the soul of young Margaret Hastings, as mists and vapour pass from a clear mountain lake when the sun shines on it. It was as if an angel walked beside her, and took away all pain from her heart.

“What was that I felt against him yesterday and these many days past? My nature is indeed corrupt if it rebel against the empire of goodness and truth and beauty;—desiring to monopolise them—to make them minister to my gratification alone, instead of rejoicing to see their influence shed abroad on others. Selfish! selfish! Is *this* my affection? It is unworthy of him and of me! Away with it!”

Thus thought Margaret, as they stood together on the terrace, before the drawing-room windows, whence the one prospect from Sunny Bank was obtained. Arundel was always attracted by that prospect. In the season of his affliction he had spent hour after hour gazing thence under the shade of his clasped hands. Unconsciously they were clasped, now

above his eyelids as of old, and he looked out into the distance. Margaret imitated him without being aware that she did so. Many little habits of Arundel's she had acquired without being aware of it. Hers was an admiring, child-like love, which brought as one visible consequence an unconscious assimilation of words, looks, tones, and gestures. Had they inhabited the same house always, they would have been like brother and sister.

"Why is it that a look out yonder seems to cheer and elevate my heart?" asked Margaret. "It is not beautiful, like the view from the south terrace at Carleton. It is always confused and misty. After all this time of living here I hardly know exactly what objects are there."

"I think I have found out its secret attraction," replied Arundel. "In this sunny spot of greenery—this pleasant nest for the bipeds without feathers—the soul finds herself imprisoned; she roams round and round in search of an outlet by which she may wander into the unknown—the distant. Here, from this point, she can take wing—away beyond her narrow though dear environment—out into infinity. 'What we can see but cannot see over is as good as infinite,' I have heard. 'It is so to me,' he added, turning his large pure eyes up to the depth of the azure zenith.

"And to me!" said Margaret, looking up too; but no higher than those heaven-reflecting eyes. In a few moments they turned earthwards again. He heaved a sigh, and then said, with a slight smile:

"When I turn landscape gardener at North Ashurst, or at Carleton, upon that principle shall I cut down trees and make openings in tangled thickets. I will have in my gardens the idea of seclusion, which is necessary to the development of our individual human life; but I will make provision, too, for those blessed moments when we feel that we are but parts of a great whole, and our spirits rush out to mingle with the universe, and become a part of the eternal Creator and Supporter of all things. Is there anything strange in what I say, that you look so, Margaret?" he asked, as he caught the ex-

pression of her face. "As strange as the thing I know not," you are inclined to say. Yet you have, or I mistake greatly, a pretty natural turn for metaphysical speculation yourself, which would repay cultivation in spite of your healthy sensuous organization (the foundation of all *healthy super-sensualism*, be it said), and in spite of your feminine tendency to reflect rather than to originate thought—to take in rather than to give out."

Now Margaret had a notion, picked up in some conversation between François de Merville and her aunt, that "*les idées philosophiques et métaphysiques*" should not be dwelt on with Arundel. She loved to hear him talk, and not least when she could not quite understand him; but now she tried to turn the current of his thoughts. Had it been any one else who talked so she would have indulged her girlish humour more freely; as it was, her eyes had a comico-serious expression as she looked at him, and exclaimed:

"Oh, most gentle Jupiter! what tedious homily of metaphysics have you wearied your parishioners withal, and never cried, Have patience, good people!"

He laughed, and she went on. "Stay! here's a definition I found quoted in a book yesterday, which I wrote out for you, thinking it might enlighten your studies;" and putting her hand into the depth of a side-pocket (such *omnium gatherums* were worn in those days), she drew out a little note-book, and read, with a very English accent, the following witticism of Voltaire's:—"Quand celui qui parle ne s'entend plus et celui qui écoute ne l'entend pas—voilà la métaphysique."

He laughed again, heartily this time;—but it was at her absurd pronunciation. "For the love of St. Denis, Margaret, don't attempt to speak French until you have been in Paris."

"I may abstain from speaking French, but it will not be for love of St. Denis. I prefer a saint who carries his head in the right place. But I have not finished my comment on your homily. So, I *take in* rather than give out, do I? Now, I dare say, if I understood metaphysics and German, I might think *that* a very fine thing; but if you condescend to remem-

ber what 'to take in' means in the vulgar tongue, you will not be astonished that I resent the imputation upon myself and my sex. By way of retort, perhaps, I shall exercise what you are pleased to consider an office peculiarly masculine. Take care I don't 'give out' that Arundel libels his friends under cover of metaphysical language. Oh! you need not smile so easily. I can turn reporter."

"Margaret! What they told me is true; you *are* just the same as of old. Your talent for talking nonsense is not extinguished, at all events. Go on—'give out' a little more! I see there is still something in reserve. The corners of those eyes betray it."

"Never mind the corners of my eyes, M. le Philosophe, but deign to enlighten my poor benighted mind! You made use of some hard words just now, in speaking of your poor servant to command.

"Now, it is unpleasant to hear oneself spoken of in a language one does not understand. You said I had a *sensuous* organization! That's quite a new word to me. Outlandish, —*fatherlandish*, I suppose. I know what *sensible* means, and what *sensual* means. One is priggish and the other piggish. But what does this fine new word *sensuous* mean? I hope it's nothing bad. If it is, I'll have no connexion with it. I won't acknowledge it. Come, 'define, define, well-educated infant!'" And Margaret shook her forefinger before his face. "Nay, don't laugh it off! I really want to know. Come, you must tell me!" she added, in a coaxing tone. "I don't like to be called names, and not know what they mean."

"You need be under no anxiety," said Arundel. "By *sensuous* I don't mean anything *bad*, but quite the contrary."

"That's a little bit of comfort!" exclaimed Maggie. "But enlighten me further; and—unless we desire to have a *coup de soleil*—perhaps we had better not stand here any longer. Come into the drawing-room. It will be deliciously cool there."

"A proposal emanating from a creature at once *sensuous* and *sensible*!" observed Arundel, as he followed her through the open window into the quiet, cool drawing-room.



"Is not this nice?" she exclaimed, sinking into her usual seat—a low chair beside the piano, and so close to a window overgrown with roses and honeysuckle that she could pluck the flowers without rising from her seat. She bent forward a moment to inhale their rich perfume, and then leaning her head against the back of the chair, she looked up with an expression of real enjoyment, and exclaimed again, "Is not this nice?"

He smiled; and sat down on the music-stool, as usual—pushing aside the chair Brutus had used a short time ago.

"What are you smiling at?" she asked.

"At the satisfactory way in which you illustrate my theories."

"Pray comfort my capacity a little, and cease to talk in riddles."

"You say, 'Is not this *nice*?' I have observed that the word, as you use it, is peculiar to persons of sensuous organization. By *sensuous*, I mean having the bodily senses in a healthy state of development. Sight, ear, taste, smell, touch, all clear, correct, and happy in the performance of their allotted task, the gathering of food for the immortal spirit,—whose servants they are. In fact, just as *you* have them. I suppose you were born with a physical constitution above the average."

"Poor mamma often told me I was; that we were all healthy; but that I was the healthiest in the family. But what of that? I'd rather have a fine strong mind. I'd rather have a mind one tenth part as strong as yours than be what James often calls me in derision, 'a girl possessed of life's greatest jewel—health.'"

"Poor child! Poor Maggie! *Did* I say you were sensuous? And are you so impatient that you will not wait to hear what else I think of you; but fly at once, girl-like, to the conclusion that you're nothing else? Now, be reasonable, and listen to me! You know that I have no sense of taste or smell, and that in the slightest derangement of bodily health these eyes of mine are wont to fail me sadly."

"Poor, beautiful eyes!" murmured Margaret, looking at them tenderly, and thinking of what her aunt had told her about these defects in the nerves of sensation, and how they sprang from the dread malady which lurked within.

"Beautiful? Not truly so. They are like those remarkably fine-looking violets we used to find in the glen at Carleton, and that you used to call 'purple cheats,' because they had no perfume."

"Your comparisons are odorous, and shockingly conceited! Did the German ladies tell you your eyes were like violets?"

"They never even ventured to tell me they were *beautiful*, as an English damsel has just done."

Margaret screwed up her mouth to prevent a smile.

"You are very kind to try and make it out, that the senses are very good things to have 'in a state of health,' as you call it. I am not discontented with my lot, Arundel! I know that if God had meant me to be a pure spiritual being—one above the earth—He would have made me so. I should then have the far higher enjoyments which you have. They are much higher and nobler, I know.

'Weak body is well changed for mind's redoubled force,'

as Spenser says. How much better is it to live in the constant enjoyment of spiritual pleasures, as you do, than to enjoy them only now and then, as I do. Ah! do not think that I do not know full well how much you are every way better than I! It is thinking about this difference which has made me determine to devote myself more than I have done to mental pursuits. If I don't do that, you will soon be obliged to give up talking to me—I shall be so far below you! And here I am puzzled. If this higher spiritual nature—this poetic, artistic, sublime power is not *in* me, it will never be brought out for all my trying."

"True, true! And if it is in you it will come out without your trying, you think?" said Arundel, leaning forward to look in her face. "Now, let me tell you what *I* think. You are too healthy-minded for introspection,—*that* is morbid—

that belongs to minds like mine. Do not deceive yourself about me. In reality, my nature is inferior to yours. I am precocious, irregular, incomplete,—*diseased*. You are neither before nor behind your age—regular, complete—*normal*. This is the will of God!"

His voice sunk into a touching melancholy. The word *diseased* dwelt in Margaret's ear; she wished to drive it from his mind, and laying her hand over his long white fingers, as they rested languidly on the keys, "You are a man," she began. "I am a woman."

"Not yet, Margaret!—not yet!" And he looked up with a half smile. "You will soon be a woman, but you are still half a child. There's no hurry for you; you will be longlived, I fancy—à *longue vie, longue enfance*. And that brings me to the main object of my visit to-day. Your manner had made me forget it until now. Margaret! ever since I can remember, I have felt towards you as towards a sister. My mother's fondness for you tended to confirm mine. In her last illness, she often spoke to me of her god-daughter, and hoped that our early affection would last. She said, that in the common course of events, you would live either with your aunt or your father until you married;—and that, until that event, it must depend upon *me* to keep up our intercourse. I missed you very much while I was abroad. When I saw you that night at our house on my return, my heart sprang towards you—you looked so little changed—the same pure, honest, sweet sister that used to love me! But before the evening was over you changed—you have remained changed until to-day—now you are yourself again. Are you beginning to be capricious? Tell me what has been in your mind against me."

Margaret blushed deeply. "You will never like me again if I tell you; you will hate me."

"I will risk that," he replied, taking her hand. "Tell me, dear."

"That night I was not myself. I was envious, jealous, discontented: and yet you and James and Lord Merle were so

kind to me. It was that beautiful singer, Madame Catalani, that awoke all the bad feeling, I think. I felt envious of her talent when I saw how delighted you were by it, and remembered that I could never give you that pleasure. Then, something made me recollect that you and I belong to different ranks in life. It seemed impossible that we could always be as intimate as we have been. You would cease to care for Maggie, naturally enough, among the beautiful ladies and the great celebrities. I got so cross and miserable, that I turned sick, and was obliged to be taken away. It is very much like the history of a child's fit of naughtiness!"—she went on, trying to smile—"but it is disgraceful at my age. I don't think I could tell any one but you."

"And you could not have selected a better confidant, my sweet sister!" replied Arundel, looking at her with tender affection. "Do not believe those who tell you there can be no friendship between a woman and a man while they are young. It is not so. Our childish fondness is ripening into real friendship. Of love, Margaret, you know nothing, I am sure, except what you have learned from books. You will know it, in time; but I am selfish enough to hope it may not be for several years. Until love comes, with its imperious demands upon heart, soul, brain—will you give me your friendship? Say, will you be a sister to Arundel Raby—who has so much need of a sister's love?"

"Will I, Arundel?"—Margaret's tears overflowed as she clasped his hand. "When your mother died, she whispered these words to me—'My child, be a sister to Arundel while you live!' and I said then, as I say now, *I will, I will*. If you only knew how happy it makes me to think you really *care* for my affection—I should have gone on caring for and thinking about you always!—but to know that you care enough about me to want me for a friend, now you are a man—this is, indeed, sweet. God bless you. I am so happy!" And she bent down her head, and kissed the hand she held.

Arundel pressed his lips gently on the crown of the bowed head, and whispered, "Dear, dear Margaret. Come what

may, you and I are henceforth friends. You will not shrink from me when the dark days come?"

"Shrink from you?" she replied, in the same low tone, and without raising her head. She feared to see his face, or to show her own. "Shrink from you *then*. May my God shrink from me in the hour of death and on the day of judgment, if I forsake you in your affliction, Arundel! Trust Margaret Hastings."

"I do. Do not agitate yourself. Our compact is complete. May it make us both better and happier. Lean back, and listen!" he said, after they had remained silent some minutes.

She did as he desired; and he improvised a series of movements on the pianoforte, which calmed and soothed her mind, and led it gradually back to its usual tone of gladness.

Seeing some music on a table, he took it up, looked over it, and selecting a piece, went to the piano with it.

"It is two years since I heard your voice; come and sing this to me." He played the symphony, and they were soon perfectly happy, while she sang "*Lascia ch' io pianga*."

There are few earthly pleasures greater than that enjoyed by two persons who understand the music they are performing together, and who, at the same time, love and understand each other.

"Now I must go, Margaret!" he said. "Good-bye."

**PART IV.**

**THE LAST GENERATION OF A NOBLE  
HOUSE.**



## CHAPTER I.

### MULTUM IN PARVO.

WITHIN a week after the date of my last chapter, Miss Hastings passed away to the land where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Lord Carleton had several interviews with her before her death. From these, and from private letters and papers which passed into his hands as her executor, he found out how much he had misapprehended her character and conduct. His general rules for the judgment of men and women had all failed in this case. True, she had a strong will and vigorous intellectual faculties, but these she had made subservient to her first, last, only love—the love for himself. A love which she believed herself in conscience bound not to indulge in the ordinary way. She satisfied herself as to what was right for herself to do, and she did it, at all costs. Intellectual exercise and acts of beneficence became to her, as to every one who practises them, a source of pleasure, a solace, a comfort; and in the course of time she found in them compensation for her renunciation of woman's sweetest happiness. Those who did not know her well, did not think her amiable; while those who did, thought few women so worthy to be loved. Her parents and near kindred loved her the best in their family. Lady Carleton and Miss Price thought there could be no better friend. Lovers she lacked not at any period of her life. In youth, she had several besides Lord Carleton: in womanhood, Dr. Ward loved her always, though she was blind to the fact.

This was the private history of a woman whom the world called "cold," "hard," "incapable of loving or inspiring love." The world makes many such mistakes, and would be astonished to hear of the love that has been accumulated by some of the people who are least in its good graces; and of the romances lived by the old maids and bachelors it laughs at, and cannot get up a sentiment about.

It may be matter for surprise that the ambitious Lord



Carleton should not seek a lady of higher rank and more influential connexion for his second wife ; but, it must be remembered, that while Miss Hastings lived, he could scarcely do so. He was ambitious ; but I have described him very ill if the reader is not aware that he had a refined and truly noble nature, and that his ambition was neither vulgar nor headlong.

Even supposing no touch of romantic memory survived in his heart (which I do not believe), still there were many prudential and some affectionate reasons why Miss Hastings was the best wife he could select.

After the death of Miss Hastings, Lord Carleton sought no other wife. A strange gloom and discontent overspread his character, and his interest in public affairs gradually declined during the next five years, and then ceased.

Miss Hastings did not leave her property to her favourite niece, as it was believed she would. She left it to her brother, the Rector of Carleton, thinking that it was wiser to do so than to give it all to a young girl. Could Miss Hastings have foreseen that her brother would only survive her two years, and that he would leave all his children dependent upon their eldest brother, she would have made a different will.

Her nephew, Henry, she judged rightly to be a grasping worldly-minded, respectable gentleman—who was only withheld by his fear of the world's opinion from taking every possible advantage of the rest of the family, after his father's death. James and Margaret were the two who suffered most from their father's will. Henry, who was by this time married, and in the full exercise of his prodigious talent for pushing on in the world, was not inclined to give them their fair share of the property, small as it was. He had so many objections to make to their wishes, that they ceased to express them ; and James, whose prospects in Mr. Harrington's firm were good, hoped that the time would soon come when he and Margaret could set up housekeeping together. Tom, already a smart active youth, was being trained by Henry for a merchant. In the meantime, Margaret, whose natural home was

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her brother Henry's house, went there very little, as the spirit of the household was positively painful to her—it was so unlike that to which she had been accustomed at Sunny Bank and at Carleton Rectory. She sometimes stayed with Sophia in London, who had taken charge of their youngest sister, Clara,—occasionally with Mrs. Harrington, or with the Greys at Langford Grange; but the greatest part of her time during the first three years succeeding her father's death, was spent with a household dearer to her than any other—that of Lord Carleton.

It was very different from what it had been. His two wards, Lady Alice and Lady Geraldine Trevor, gave a light and life to the old castle and the town house which they had long wanted. His sons were generally at home, and had friends to visit them. Lady Fortescue and her children were frequently in the house for weeks together—Lady Glengarry paid solemn visitations of a similar length. Miss Price was the darling of the young ladies, and was engaged in all their plans of amusement. But the highborn damsels loved Margaret Hastings, the Rector's daughter, “abune a’ thing,” as the ballad says. They had taken a fancy to her ardent yet *spirituelle* expression of face and unaffected manner, before they parted on that first night of meeting in Miss Price's room at Raby House; and delighted enough they were, when first domesticated at Carleton, to hear that “the girl with pale gold hair, and bonnie brown eyes,” was their near neighbour; and that Lord Carleton particularly wished them to cultivate her acquaintance, as she was the late Lady Carleton's god-daughter.

Margaret was a general favourite at the castle. Lord Carleton grew exceedingly fond of her, and when her father died was desirous to have her installed in his house as companion to his wards, but Margaret objected to that, and compromised matters by spending several months of every year at Carleton Castle. Lord Merle and Arundel rejoiced to have her in the house; and Miss Price loved Margaret. Every one loved this girl except some of the visitors. Lady Glengarry,

for instance, who frowned on a person like Margaret, who was too prone to love the good things of earth. She considered her animal spirits as carnal and reprehensible, and her general mode of thinking and acting as something indecent in a miserable sinner. Besides, her ladyship objected to Margaret's presumption in wearing dresses like those of *her* nieces, the daughters of the Duke of Alderney, and in forgetting the vast social difference between them and a parson's child. In short, Lady Glengarry did not consider Margaret as one of the elect, either in this world or the next. Whether she viewed her in the light of "a vessel of wrath," or in that of "a little minx," she was equally odious to her proud and pious ladyship.

Lady Fortescue was too good-hearted, in the main, to hate any one who had much of the quality of goodness; but she had had some prejudices against Margaret, which she never wholly got rid of—not even when Margaret became really fond of her children. These prejudices she derived from her brother and husband, who hated Margaret instinctively, as people whose whole life is a sort of lie hate those whose strongest characteristic is truth.

Among the servants she was generally liked. I may as well add, that on the death of Miss Hastings and the purchase of Sunny Bank by Mr. Arundel Raby, the servants had been transported thence to Carleton, the younger ones being employed at the Rectory, and Audrey and Joseph Rosemary being established at the Castle—Audrey as housekeeper, *vice* Mrs. Fenton, superannuated; and Rosemary as head-gardener, *vice* Cuthbert, deceased.

This is the general summary of events between our last chapter and the next—the date of which is about two years and a half afterwards, and about nine months after my grandfather's death. It is Christmas time, and Margaret is spending the season at Carleton Castle. Already she is more thoughtful—less gay. She is a woman now, and "looks before and after," and begins to "pine for what is not;" but she is religious—healthy—young; and has a heart "full of great love." She is not unhappy, though death has deprived her at so early

an age of parents and home. Sorrow has given a tenderness to her character which in the first flush of youth it wanted, perhaps. Her age is about twenty, as I reckon.

## CHAPTER II.

### CARLETON AGAIN—LADY GERALDINE.

“A lovely lady garmented in light  
From her own beauty ;—deep her eyes as are  
Two openings of unfathomable night  
Seen through a tempest's cloven roof ;—her hair  
Dark ;—the dim brain whirls dizzy with delight  
Picturing her form ; her soft smiles shone afar ;  
And her low voice was heard like love, and drew  
All living things towards this wonder new.”

THIS stanza from Shelley's “Witch of Atlas” always came to my mind whenever I looked at the portrait of the Lady Geraldine Trevor, which used to hang in my aunt's bedroom at Carleton. Her beauty, genius, and unhappy fate, which influenced the household of her guardian so sadly, had for me a peculiar fascination in boyhood. I used to stand before her portrait in the twilight repeating these lines, and thinking over her story and the proofs of her high poetic genius.

“The fatal gift of beauty ?” I thought. “What is that to the fatality of the gift of genius to a woman ?” I was a very young man, and did not perceive the falseness of the thought. I am beyond the Byronic age now, and am disposed to ask if beauty be a fatal gift, what sort of gift is ugliness ? If genius be a troublesome possession for a woman, what sort of gift is stupidity ? Let us have no cant of mediocrity ! State fairly the advantages and disadvantages of beauty and genius to any woman capable of understanding them, and give her her choice,—to have one or both, or to be without either, and be sure she will dare the possession of them. They are good and glorious gifts. Like wisdom, “more to be desired are they

than gold;" and, like wisdom, they are to be perverted to no low or selfish use; but must help to keep their owners' souls unspotted from the world, while they draw other souls after them.

No one could look at this portrait and mistake it for that of a person of ordinary mind. There was a strange thrilling charm about Lady Geraldine's appearance which repelled some and attracted others.

At the age of twenty, Lady Geraldine Trevor had attained a rare excellence in poetic composition. I have within my desk MS. poems by her that refute all theories concerning woman's inability to become an artist of a high order. She was emphatically a poet;—far above the popular verse-writers and poets of her day. She had the subtle spirituality which they wanted, and lacked none of their other poetic qualities. Wordsworth and Shelley, whom she rated far above the more popular poets, and to whom she sent anonymously some of her poems, were both highly curious about their author. Wordsworth praised them with little grudging, and Shelley was eloquent in his admiration and in prophecy of their author's fame, "if he would publish." Each acknowledged the true Promethean fire in the poetry of their unknown correspondent, and felt that, like themselves, he was beyond his age. Strangely enough, neither of them detected the sex of the writer. Coleridge alone, of the very few men whose opinion she cared to ask about her poetry, discovered her sex from the internal evidence, and assured her, in an eloquent letter, that no woman, *as yet*, had written as she wrote, and that she was already a true and great poet, though the world might never have heard her name. He exhorted her to preserve religiously that "shaping spirit of imagination" with which God had so richly endowed her; and to forswear all earthly temptations to mar or misuse it—reminding her that the poet's vocation is at once the highest ministry and the sweetest blessing of earth. If Samuel Taylor Coleridge could have seen that high-born maiden as she perused his letter—a deep delight triumphant in her face, perchance he would have

been inspired again as in that marvellous dream, and would not have

"Left half told  
The story of Khan Kubla old."

But he knew not who she was—so strictly had she preserved her incognito through the help of a male friend, upon whom she relied in these adventures; certain that he would preserve her secret. From him she had received a packet containing, among other papers, this precious letter from the author of "Christabel," on this Christmas morning at Carleton Castle.

It was one of the old fashioned Christmas-days; bright, frosty, and intensely cold. The wide expanse of park was dazzlingly white with the light of the mid-day sun on the untrodden snow, which had lain there already four or five days. From the snowy boughs of the skeleton trees, scattered here and there, singly or in groups, over the undulating ground, hung long fantastic icicles which glittered like crystal. The lake was frozen; the clear and sunny air seemed frost-bound, it was so motionless and silent. No sound was heard; it was Nature's sleeping-time; she was resting between the year's work done and the year's work yet to do.

Lady Geraldine looked down over this silent scene from a small room high up in one of the turrets which it was her fancy to occupy as a study. Nothing would induce her to have it made, what Margaret called, "comfortable." A chair to hold herself and a table to hold her desk, was all the furniture she consented to have. These, with a piece of carpet beneath the table, a good fire in the grate, and a closet full of books, formed her bower of bliss.

She stood at the window with the letter from Mr. Coleridge in her hand; a happy girl, as well as a genius understood and acknowledged by one whose suffrage was of more value than the applause of millions. She now felt that there was no more doubt for her as to the true nature of her genius. Henceforth she would "have no misgivings;" she would "devote herself body and soul to her sublime art." "There

can be no higher work for a human being!" she thought; "and if my own soul and the judgment of the wisest and best poets assure me I am capable of performing it, shall I shrink back cowardly from the task because it has pains and penalties? God forbid. I thank Thee, O Father Almighty, that thou hast chosen me out of the world to be one of thy sacred band of teachers. That thou hast given me a faculty of expression, by which the spirit of beauty, which sheds its light and joy over my own inner life, may be translated into other souls. Gracious Father, keep me unspotted from the world. Let no love but the love of Thee and thy Spirit, wherever it may be found, enter into this heart."

Sweet, high-souled Geraldine. She already dreaded that an earthly passion was beginning to steal over her whole being;—she struggled against it—she would not recognise it. She lost sight of it in poetic dreams of an excellence far higher than that which had caught her affections.

"Nay, it is not very hard! this martyrdom of genius," she whispered to herself. "Shall I shrink from it? Oh, this weak yearning for human love! It is well for me that there should be an insurmountable obstacle to the only earthly felicity I covet. 'Twill be the easier to shut my heart against it for ever, and live out my mortal term a consecrated priestess of art. It was my earliest aspiration, and when this temporary weakness has passed away, it will be my only one. With God in heaven and Alice on earth to love, what woman will be happier than Geraldine Trevor? Who is richer in friendship than I? That gentle, generous Margaret. My dear brother (for he *is* my brother in affection and in genius), noble, misunderstood Arundel. How sweet it will be to have such friends through life, and to add, perchance, to their happiness. Let the New Year come now. I shall not dread it."

There was a tap at the door, and a sweet voice asking permission to come in. Lady Geraldine went quickly to open the door, saying,—

"I fastened it because little Anna Fortescue threatened to creep up the stairs and burst in, that she might see what I

did in this queer place. Come in, both of you. You, Margaret, as the greatest stranger, shall sit on the chair. Alice and I will sit on the ground. Take off your bonnets. You must have had a cold drive from church. I saw the carriage winding along like a beetle in the snow, down yonder."

"Oh! that was not our carriage. It was far too cold to drive; we walked home," said Margaret, standing before the fire and rubbing her hands. "I suppose that was some of the visitors. Arundel and Mr. Morton, perhaps."

"No. I rather think it was Lord Merle and your brother," said Lady Alice, giving a privileged glance at the papers on the desk.

"What makes you think so?" inquired Margaret.

"I saw a cloak in the hall which I know belongs to one of them—lined with seal-skin," she replied, beginning to peruse a paper.

"That's James's," said Margaret; "I must run and find him. Before I go, let me deliver my invitation to the Lady Geraldine of the Turret. It may not have escaped your observation that the young scions of the house of Fortescue have become insupportable during this cold weather, when the stables, the riding-school, and the park have ceased to be attractive."

"You darling Margaret!" said Lady Geraldine, laughingly clasping her hands; "have you contrived to ship the whole cargo off to a distance? They are very charming children, I have no doubt. Anna especially,—but I never heard such noisy little wretches in my life."

"As François observed yesterday—'*enfin, un tapage de tout les diables!*'" added Margaret. "It was a crying evil, and Lady Alice and I have laid our heads together to remedy it. It is not quite the children's fault. Their governess is away, and they have no proper school or play-room. We have offered to take charge of the girls, and little Frank, and Edward, during two hours in the morning, and teach them something, so that they may not disturb you and Lord Carleton, and other studious folks, quite so much."



"It is very good of you both. But you will not be able to go through with it. You have no idea what savages they are."

"Oh! we think we shall like it!" said Lady Alice. "It will be like going as missionaries among the Otaheitans. It will be glorious to lead them one step towards civilisation. Don't wait, Margaret dear. I dare say you want to see your brother. I will tell Geraldine what we wish, and I know she will do it."

"Thank you, dear. James may be inquiring for me." And Margaret ran off humming a Christmas carol. Lady Alice went on as follows:

"Margaret knows of some old rooms in the castle that have been shut up for some time, where the noisy little creatures could not be heard by the rest of the house. So she asked Lord Carleton to let her have them opened and aired. At first he said 'No,' for he was in one of his moody fits, and afterwards he said 'Yes.' So we got the keys and went to see them. They are strange rooms, Geraldine; two are very, very beautiful—you will love them, I know. I have a plan about the marble one. Margaret has set her heart upon an old carved oak-room for our performances to-night, because it is large and lofty, has a splendid prospect, and because it has a door into a passage that leads to some other place. Margaret will not say much about these rooms; for 'thereby hangs a tale,' I fancy. But of that another time. We have taken possession of the Oak Parlour, and shut up the other rooms. Everything is made warm and comfortable, and we have planned a treat this evening for the children. We want you and Arundel (who can do everything) to get up some *tableaux vivants*, of a kind to suit a young taste, and then we want you to improvise a poetic form of some charming fairy tale; and afterwards there is to be a ball, as usual on Christmas night at Carleton. That's to be our Christmas treat to the children," said Lady Alice, smiling so sweetly that Geraldine paused to kiss her. "Well! what do you think of the idea?"

Geraldine laughed softly, in her fashion, and she glanced playfully at Alice, as she said—

“ ‘Cosi al egro fanciul  
Porgiam aspersi di,’ etc.

A pretty programme, truly. A newly discovered room—*tableaux vivants*, an improvised fairy tale, blindman's buff, and a good supper. ‘Springes to catch woodcocks.’ They will come with good-will and modest grace, on the morrow, to their lessons, you think. Provided you do not expect me to assist in the work of instruction, I am willing enough to do anything I can for their amusement—or if the real truth be spoken, to please you and Margaret. I dislike those Fortescue children—they are all so like their father. He dines here to-day, of course? Who else? Lady Glengarry? Improvising before her! It can't be done, I fear! She will freeze the verse before it flows. But I won't see her. Who else is coming to day, besides the two brothers and Mr. James Hastings?”

“Mr. Morton and Sir Willoughby,” replied Lady Alice, shrugging her shoulders slightly; “and I believe Lord Carleton invited young Grey, after the service, to-day. But now, dear, put up these precious papers, and come and take a walk with me in the corridor. You have been sitting quite long enough this morning. Dr. — said you were to take exercise in the house, though the cold was too intense for you to go out. Have you coughed much this morning?”

“I am better! quite well!” said Geraldine, kissing the roseate cheek that was so invitingly near.

“You have had news this morning?—From that man?” said Lady Alice.

“You are unjust to him, Alice. He seems what he is not. The world is too much with him.”

“You mean he is too much with the world—of the world, for the world, and has no thought beyond it. He is heartless—selfish!”

“With his brilliant enthusiasm—his poetic vein—his

thoughtful, melancholy face. Oh, Alice, you are unjust to Mr. Morton; you, who never were unjust before."

"Perhaps so, Geraldine," she said. "But it was for your sake, love, that I have watched him so narrowly. I do not like this intimacy, this private correspondence."

"Fear not, my lovely sister. Geraldine Trevor will not allow any man to break her heart. But it was not Mr. Morton's letter that raised my spirits. I have not read it. It was *this*—from the author of 'Christabel,'"—and she drew it from her bosom.

"Ha! indeed! Let me see the signature, may I? This is enough to make you better."

"The signature!—You shall see it all, darling. Are not our joys in common? Oh, Alice! this letter has given stability to my purposes."

"Let us go down to the corridor, and we will read it together," said Alice; and wrapping her own shawl round her sister, they left the room, and were soon pacing up and down the south corridor with their arms round each other, busily reading the precious letter, in silence, but with an occasional exchange of sympathetic looks, and half articulate words of pleasure and applause.

"What a letter! Geraldine, you ought to be very proud and happy!" said the delighted Alice. "Is it not what I have said so often? Did I not always know that you were very different from the hundred remarkable prodigies—young poetesses of fifteen?"

"You always said so, dearest. It is said that a poet's food is love and praise. You have given me both in abundance, and see how I have thriven on it. Will you hear the poem I have written this morning? It is good, I think, for I seemed to be in Paradise while I wrote it, and you were beside me there; but I want you to listen to it, and let me see your face the while."

Lady Geraldine's voice rose and fell like the tones of an Æolian harp as they continued their walk in the old corridor. Slowly they passed and repassed from the window where I

first saw François seated, to the corresponding one at the other end, emblazoned with the Raby arms;—gliding noiselessly over the matted floor, on which no footfall was heard. Alice brought her sister here for a “duty walk” every day, when the weather was too severe for her to take exercise in the open air; for Geraldine was threatened with pulmonary disease, and Alice watched her with the anxiety of a mother.

As they were passing in front of one of the doors, they saw it open from within, and Lord Carleton came out,—pale, dejected, and with an air of shyness at being seen. They said a few common-place words to him about its being pleasant to walk there, and then Lord Carleton hurried away. The two girls were painfully affected at the depression under which he seemed to labour, and which affected his carriage and gait.

“See how he walks! with his head sunk on his breast, his arms hanging helplessly, and his legs dragging as if they would give way under him!” said Lady Alice. “He is not himself. I wonder what is the matter with him. Audrey told me that many years ago Lord Carleton was——”

“Hush, hush!” said Geraldine, nervously, pressing her sister’s arm. “There is some one behind us.”

Alice stopped, and looked round. It was Lord Merle. They waited till he came up and shook hands with them. This he did with the graceful cordiality peculiar to him, but Lady Geraldine thought his mind was pre-occupied, even when his eye rested upon Alice.

“A merry Christmas to you both—to us all! I am looking about for everybody. Have you seen my father?” he said, with a touch of anxiety in his tone.

“He was here just now!” replied Alice. “He came from one of those rooms.”

“Ah! I am sorry for that!” exclaimed the young man, quickly. “He is not well, I fear.”

“I think his spirits have been very low for the last week; and he certainly has been restless and uncomfortable,” replied Geraldine. “Margaret Hastings says he will be better when he sees you and your brother again.”

"Go now!" said Alice. "Do not stay. We will treat you unusually well if you restore Lord Carleton's spirits. It makes us unhappy to see him in this state. There! go now. I dare say you will find him in his study, and dear Miss Price with him. She says he should not be left alone. So she finds it necessary to consult the great folios there."

Slowly Lord Merle withdrew his eyes from the fair girl, whom he hoped some day to call *wife*, and whom he loved as he had never loved any woman—wholly, devotedly, and with reverence almost religious. After he was gone, the sisters spoke of him.

"How bright, how handsome he is!" exclaimed Alice. "Really Arundel's idea is correct, and Frank is like sunlight on the waves in summer. The house grows darker when he leaves it!"

"It is well *you* think so, darling!"

"Why do you say *that*, Geraldine, when you know Lord Merle is no more to me than he is to you? Remember, my father's will enjoins no *mariage de convenance*. He is emphatic on that point. 'If my daughter can give her heart with her hand,' he says; 'not else.' Not else, indeed!"

Her voice faltered, and her cheek became paler; so much so, indeed, that Margaret Hastings, who was approaching at the moment with her brother James, said, when they approached—

"You are looking very pale, Lady Alice!—you must be fatigued."

"Not in the least, I thank you. How do you do, Mr. Hastings?"

"You left Mrs. Russell well, I hope?" asked Lady Geraldine with marked courtesy, but without any of that graceful freedom which made her manner so charming in general. It seemed as if she had some feeling in her mind against this young man. It was strange that it should be so, for he had many qualities that gain a woman's good opinion. He was a perfect gentleman in appearance and manner. There was a winning look of gentleness and truth in his face—he was

modest, brave, and withal of a quiet, determined spirit, that influenced others in a way quite marvellous to themselves. Lord Merle and Margaret both felt that they could take no important step in life without consulting James. There was something irresistibly amiable about him; and Lady Geraldine always protested that she "hated amiable people!"—she said they were "all either crafty or silly." She could not think my father was either. But perhaps she suspected the passion he felt for her sister; and the Trevor pride rebelled against it; perhaps she was tired of hearing Lord Merle declare that "there was no one like James Hastings"—as the Athenians wearied of hearing Aristides called *The Just*.

My father replied with ease and dignity to Lady Geraldine's inquiries about Mrs. Russell and other London acquaintances, and then lapsed into silence, and walked beside Lady Alice. Margaret walked on the other side of Lady Geraldine.

"I have been thinking about the children's fête," said the latter. "I wish Arundel would come. He knows so much, and has such exquisite taste in *tableaux*. However, as the time is so short, we must get up something easy. Shall it be from the World of Poetry or from that of History?"

"Oh, for children like the Fortescues it had better be from history," said Margaret. "I don't think they ever heard any poetry but Dr. Watts's hymns. If you could get up a *tableau* of the Sluggard, now, to serve as a frightful example to Master Jacky, it might *tell*, perhaps. Otherwise, let us have some well-known incidents from English history. Alfred giving Bread to the Beggar—Margaret of Anjou, the little Prince and the Robber—Queen Elizabeth and Raleigh with the Cloak, etc."

Lady Geraldine laughed. "I'll have nothing to do with scenes so hackneyed. Wait till Arundel comes, and then trust all to us."

"Oh, willingly!" said Margaret. "I know, dear, you are both much better judges than I. And, perhaps, it may be best for the children to see something they don't quite understand."

"Unquestionably it is! Let them stretch their lazy young minds up to the height of our great argument. I have chosen a few subjects for improvisation. It shall be one they know—'Cinderella,' 'The Yellow Dwarf,' 'The White Cat,' and the 'Sleeping Beauty.' You shall fix on one of these tales—or, let the little ones choose, and tell me at the time. By the way, can we see this wonderful oak parlour of yours? Is it possible to arrange a curtain? Have you secured George Green and his wife? We can do nothing in carpentry or upholstery without them."

"Oh," said Margaret, "you don't know half the Raby accomplishments. Arundel is as good a carpenter as Green, and Lord Merle is a better. They will be too happy to work under your direction. I can make long stitches capitally. Oh, you shall see. Then the room is *made* for our purpose."

Lady Alice said she was tired and would go to her own room. Geraldine could come to her when she had seen the oak parlour. She accompanied them to the corner of another gallery, down which she glided, and James Hastings saw her no more till she appeared in the full lustre of her adorned beauty at the dinner-hour. He spent some time answering Lady Fortescue's questions about North Ashurst, and ended by saying "North Ashurst will be a model to all English landed proprietors in twenty years' time, if Arundel continue alive and well. He is not for making a sudden stride forward in one direction and standing still everywhere else. His plan is for slow, continuous, general progress. If there is one thing about which he is Quixotic, it is his belief in the effect of education. His schools are his greatest hobby."

"I have heard they are quite absurd!" said the lady. "That he has the lowest children taught a great many things besides what it is proper they should be taught—to read and write, and say their catechism. Depend upon it, Mr. Hastings, no good will come out of all this. It's just rank Radicalism and nothing else."

"What *are* the Radicals, mamma?" inquired Jacky Fortescue, who, with his sister Anna, had just entered the room.

"You and Lord Carleton are for everlasting talking about them! What are they?"

"My dear," said Lady Fortescue, smoothing the rough head of her darling, "the Radicals are people who live in the midland counties, and burn haystacks."

"Then cousin Arundel can't be a Radical!" exclaimed Anna; "for North Ashurst is not in the midland counties—it's in Yorkshire."

Presently, two or three more children came bursting into the room, and James Hastings withdrew. As he had time enough before dinner, he went down to the village, and called at the Rectory to see his old companion, William Grey, the new rector—who was living there *en garçon*.

"It's not so pleasant living here as it used to be, James," observed that worthy young ecclesiastic. "Somehow, nothing is as pleasant as it used to be. I thought I should like coming to live here for the sake of old times; and now I find it's the thought of the old times that makes me so wretched here! I go about the house thinking of your father and mother, and all us boys; and Sophia and Margaret—and—little Naldo. I often think of him. When I see '*Aged 11 years*' on his tombstone, I can scarcely believe all his suffering and knowledge was crammed into so short a space. I can't bear this life much longer. I get as stupid as a dormouse alone here in the winter."

"It is not good for man to live alone, you know," said James; "and it is not good for the parish that the parson should. Suppose you turn your thoughts to a wife."

"D'ye think I should have a chance of getting the woman I want?"

"It's my belief that a man will get anything he wants, if he try hard enough."

"Humph!" said Brutus. "I suppose it's time for me to dress. If you will wait a quarter of an hour we can walk back together. Go about the house as you like—it's all open—you're free of the place—not naturalised, like me, but born a natural."



He laughed heartily at his own clumsy witticism, and James did so too. They both felt a genuine liking for each other, founded upon those early associations.

As he paced about the familiar rooms, James Hastings' thoughts glided from the past to the present. "Would to God Arundel were right!—that by intellect and industry I could found a house nobler than that of Raby or Trevor. How I would toil to win my bride, if *that* were all that is required. I would even dare the scornful finger of the worldly great; they might call me adventurer, fortune-hunter, vulgar intruder. If I thought there was any love in her heart, all pride should be cast to the winds! No sacrifice, not even that bitter one, would be too great to make for her! And, sure of her love, nothing human or material should hinder me in my course to fame and fortune. The name of Trevor should veil its honours before those of Hastings. But how can this be? Shall I seek to win her from my friend—the friend who is dearer to me than a brother? She is Merle's promised bride; and he loves her! I am sure of it; I can read it in his face. Can Merle woo *any* woman in vain? There is no restraint upon him—no terrible conventional gulf fixed between them. She *will* love him, even if she do not love him now. Here! Here! Coming, Grey. Don't make such a noise."

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### CHAPTER III.

#### CHRISTMAS NIGHT AT CARLETON.

"Madness in great ones must not unwatched go."

*Hamlet.*

WHILE Margaret was dressing for dinner on the Christmas-day spoken of in the last chapter, Audrey, the housekeeper, came to her room.

"Oh, Miss Margaret! I'm glad you are dressed! And very nice you look in that beautiful green velvet. It's just like my Lady Geraldine's, I see. I'm very glad her ladyship

had her way in *that*. As if it was any business of Lady Glengarry's what *you* wear! Who was *her* grandfather, I should like to know?"

"Did you come here merely to admire my velvet gown, and to abuse Lady Glengarry? Yes! The sleeves are Lady Geraldine's taste. I think the dress lovely. And don't I look beautiful in it?—come, say so!—when Lady Geraldine does not wear hers?" asked Margaret, laughing.

"Who would have thought that *you* would grow conceited? However, Miss Margaret, I will say this, that green velvet is very becoming to fair young ladies with light-gold hair; though it may not make them as handsome as the Ladies Trevor. But, my dear child, there's no time to lose; I want you to come with me to the state drawing-room. Lord Carleton told Lady Alice that he wished the evening to be spent there. He has always been accustomed to spend Christmas evening in that room. So she ordered me to have it prepared, and I have done my best; but it looks very dull. The company is to assemble in the usual drawing-room before dinner; and I thought if you would just come and look at the state-room, my dear, you could give me an idea how to make it look more comfortable. You can't make it smaller or less like a place for ghosts to haunt, and all sorts of unpleasantnesses to happen in; but you have such a clever knack of making rooms look cheerful and lively, that I thought you might give me a hint. Lady Alice is a very particular young lady, I can tell you—and it's my lord's wish to have this great dreary room."

"I am ready, Audrey," said my aunt.

She had not a very clear recollection of the state-room, and was struck by its gloomy magnificence.

"I've done the best I could, Miss Margaret," said Audrey; "but it would give me the horrors to sit here alone!"

"It's not exactly the room for a merry Christmas party, certainly, Audrey," replied my aunt, for she knew Audrey's weakness for a romance *à la* Radcliffe. "It reminds you of that state drawing-room in the haunted chambers, in the

Castle of Udolpho—the same Venetian mirrors, low, carved and gilded sofas, high-backed chairs, you see! Don't you remember when Ludovico and the Count and Henri stand in the middle of the room——?”

“Now, Miss Margaret, don't you begin to tease about that, because, you see, it *is* really like—a little—— But then there is no Wicked Marchioness.”

“Oh, but there *was* a Wicked Earl, here, you know. He used to give grand parties in this room. But I have no time to torment you now. Let us see what can be done! In the first place, put lamps wherever you can find room for them. All this dark velvet, this oak and ebony, require a great quantity of light. Throw a light on that beautiful picture of Lady Carleton and the children. Let there be a lamp on that table. Then make Rosemary send you all the plants he has in blossom in the hot-houses,—*plants*, remember, not cut flowers, and dispose them about the room. Open that large screen, and place it so that it shelters that easy-chair and sofa from the draughts. And, Audrey, you have not a single sprig of holly about the room! That's an ill omen at Christmas-time. Lord Carleton will notice it. There is the bell! I must go!” And away ran Margaret Hastings.

Some four hours afterwards a fair company was assembled in the state-room. The additional light—the flowers—the graceful well-dressed figures, and the buzz of conversation—all conspired to mitigate the solemn grandeur of the apartment: but it had the uncomfortable aspect of an unused room—one not accustomed to the frivolities of daily life.

Lady Alice and Margaret presided over the tea-table, for in those days it was the fashion for ladies of rank to make tea for their guests. A silver urn, of exquisite shape and adorned with classic figures, was placed in front of Lady Alice, and sent forth its soft vapour and pleasant bubbling song. She was carefully examining the pattern of a teacup while she waited the due time for the infusion of the tea. Lord Merle and James Hastings stood beside her. Sir Willoughby and Mr. Grey were seated together near the table, the former with

his back to Margaret, who was dispensing coffee at the other end of the table, and Mr. Grey with his back to Lady Alice. They were both in eager converse.

"She's a perfect beauty! There isn't such another in the county!" exclaimed William Grey, emphatically. "I'd back her against all Yorkshire."

"Never set eyes on her for more than an instant," replied the dandy; "but I'm inclined to believe you're right. She looked thorough-bred."

"Looked! of course she did. She's the sweetest thing going. There's not a bit of vice in her!" replied Mr. Grey, striking his open palm on his knee.

"What *are* they talking about? Not Margaret, surely?" asked Lady Alice, looking up at Lord Merle and his friend. They laughed.

"Oh no!" said the former; "of something they find more interesting—Grey's new mare, Meg Merrilies."

Lady Alice smiled. "There's an error mingled with your truth. Mr. Grey, will you take tea or coffee?"

Thus appealed to, the awkward young man turned round suddenly. "Either—Oh," glancing at the other end of the table—"I'll take coffee, thank you!" And he betook himself to Margaret directly.

"Did you hear his charming blunder at dinner?" asked Lord Merle, dropping into a seat, for the convenience of *sotto voce* speaking, and a better sight of the face he loved.

"Poor Mr. Grey!" said Alice. "It's too bad to laugh at him. It is refreshing to see any one so thoroughly in love!"

"Such refreshment must be plentiful enough where Lady Alice——" began Lord Merle. "What do you mean by that mocking look? Did you ever see anything like the remorseless way in which this lady rejects a plain, wholesome truth, James?"

"Mr. Hastings never attempted to force such truths upon me. He knows instinctively what sort of truth a woman likes."

"Do you, James? That comes of having had sisters.

Pray enlighten me on the subject of agreeable truth-telling—to fair dames!—A little more sugar, thank you.”

“If they are fair, they have the gift to know it,” said Mr. Morton, who had approached the table, and overheard Lord Merle’s last words. “You will gain nothing by telling them what they are more fully convinced of than you are. Is it not so, Lady Alice? It is not admiration for their beauty they want; it is a passionate love—a delicate, tender sentiment entertained for them upon no clearly-defined or comprehensible ground—eh! Mr. Hastings?” And Mr. Morton’s eyelids drooped, and beneath them his sharp eyes watched Lady Alice, who smiled furtively at James Hastings’ reply.

“Had I been asked, I should have said that Mr. Morton had no idea of entertaining a passionate love, or a tender, delicate sentiment for a woman, except upon clearly-defined and very easily comprehensible grounds.”

Lady Alice spoke—“Lady Glengarry takes no sugar, Mr. Morton—she allows none in her house. She is despotically anti-slavish. If you ask her by mistake whether she will take sugar, one would think by the expression of her face you had asked her to take arsenic, or to go to high mass.”

“Your brother agrees with her on the slavery question, I suppose?” asked Mr. Morton of Lord Merle. He sings the abolitionist song—

“‘No, dear lady, none for me.  
West Indian sugar spoils my tea;  
I cannot, dare not drink it.’”

“I don’t think he has made up his mind on the subject,” replied his nephew. “He is a little better qualified to see the many sides of a question than Lady Glengarry and her blind benevolent party—who do so much mischief in the world by way of reforming it in a summary way. But here comes Arundel! You can ask him.”

“I beg you will not, Mr. Morton!” said Lady Alice. “This tea-table is my kingdom, and I allow no one to oppose me here. Let us have no discussion of the anti-slavery question.”

"Delighted to hear you say so, Alice!" said Arundel. "Lady Glengarry has been holding forth to me on that subject till I volunteered, in desperation, to fetch her some tea. *Without* sugar—it must be! She gave very strict orders on that head."

They all laughed.

"Who is that cup for, then, Mr. Morton?—Oh, Geraldine takes no cream. Give that to Lady Fortescue. Which do you take yourself? You really make a very good footman, Mr. Morton!" she said, as he carried away the cup to her sister.

"Oh! my uncle takes coffee, of course!" said Arundel—

"Coffee, that makes the politician wise,  
And see through all things with his half-shut eyes"—

he repeated in a low tone, and with a humorous imitation of Mr. Morton's peculiar dropping of the eyelids. They all laughed: and when Mr. Morton returned, Arundel said to him—"You were saying something about the search after truth, just now, I think. Lady Glengarry wishes to hear you on that subject. She told me to come and fetch you to her. I suppose you are hardly disposed to go just yet! She wants you to take the chair at some anti-slavery meeting."

"Is not that more in your way?" asked the uncle. "They are becoming very popular."

"Anti-slavery meetings are not my business. I have quite as much as I can manage in the battle against the slavery of ignorance and idleness at home. My hands are full. *Quant à la popularité*—that, surely, is more in your line than mine."

When Mr. Morton returned to his post beside Lady Geraldine, who was reclining on the sofa which Margaret had chosen for her in the warmest part of the room, he seemed to devote himself to entertaining her and Lord Carleton. The latter did not appear in a mood to be entertained. He leaned back listlessly in his fauteuil, with his head thrown upwards, and his eyes fixed on the picture of his wife, with her twin boys. Lord Merle and his brother had agreed not to call

attention to the depressed state of their father's mind, that evening, by showing the anxiety they felt on the subject. They watched him from a distance—occasionally speaking to him, and keeping away those persons whom they thought likely to annoy him. He was very fond of Lady Geraldine; and when he observed her seated on the sofa near him, he patted her shoulder in a fatherly way, and said :

"That is well my little poetess!—for they tell me you are one. I like to have you near me. Come and talk to me!"

Geraldine did talk to him upon various subjects. At length he said, looking towards the tea-table, and as if they had frequently discussed the subject before, though it had never been even touched upon between them—"They will make a very beautiful couple!—a very beautiful couple!" He was falling into a strange habit of repeating his words. Geraldine knew this was one sign of a weakening intellect—Margaret, who understood the matter, had said so.

"Do you mean Alice and Lord Merle?" she asked, softly, and as if she were speaking to a sick person or a child who could not bear contradiction.

"Of course! of course, my dear. Who else could I mean? Frank is a fine fellow!" And the languid eyes lighted up with pride and affection. "Did you ever see any young man so perfect in every way? Look at him now! What a princely bearing he has! I suppose even a young lady may be allowed to praise him. Tell me candidly what you, a poetess—for they tell me you are one—think of my son. My son, Viscount Merle! Duke of Carleton that will be! Honestly now, have you ever seen his equal?"

"Never!" said Lady Geraldine. She spoke steadily, but without enthusiasm, as it seemed.

"You need not blush, my dear. I am quite an old man now. And there is no harm in praising your sister's husband, you know. She agrees with you, of course; she must. What is James Hastings doing behind her? I don't see very well—but I thought he touched her hair. He could not be so audacious!"

"Oh, no," said Geraldine.

She had seen what Lord Carleton noticed. A flower had become detached from the chaplet which Alice wore round her head, and was falling, when James Hastings, thinking the action unperceived, stole it away and hid it in his bosom. It was at this juncture Mr. Morton came up, and began to converse with Lady Geraldine.

There was a good deal of laughter at both ends of the tea-table. Sir John Fortescue and Sir Willoughby Morton were conversing in rather loud tones about the Austrian or Russian embassy. Lady Fortescue and Lady Glengarry were talking in mysterious whispers upon a strange variety of matters—all connected with the house in which they were visiting.

"I'm sure *you* must understand my anxiety on this point, my dear Lady Fortescue!" said the rigid child of grace, pursuing up her lips and stirring her tea. "My dear nieces had all the spiritual advantages which I could procure for them, and I believe they learned to despise the pomps and vanities of the world. But here, alas!—exposed to the contamination of mixed society—having for constant companion a giddy young person like Miss Hastings——"

"I don't think there is any harm in her!" interrupted Lady Fortescue. "She is an amiable, lively, cleverish sort of person. My children are really fond of her. She and Lady Alice are going to give them some sort of treat to-night. They are half mad with delight! Miss Hastings persuaded Lord Carleton to let her do what she liked in a certain old room."

Lady Glengarry half shut her eyes, with that vicious look peculiar to a bull before it makes a run at its victim. The simile is not extravagant.

"Miss Hastings persuading Lord Carleton! Take care she don't persuade him into doing what she likes in more important matters! God forbid that I should be given to worldly scandal. It does not concern *me*; but if I had any personal interest in the Raby family, I should warn them against the machinations of that girl. Just look at her now!—hanging



over Lord Carleton's chair, in that familiar, I might say *affectionate*, manner. It's quite disgusting! Such open, unblushing familiarity with a man!"

Lady Fortescue was startled at this new view of things. Worldling as she was, it had never suggested itself to her; it was reserved for the very pious mind of Lady Glengarry to fancy there might be a deep design in my aunt's general amiability and particular attention to Lord Carleton. She uttered some sentences in opposition to the saintly slanderer.

"Oh! you forget!—Lord Carleton was her father's friend. She was Lady Carleton's god-daughter. He looks upon her as if she were his own child!"

"No man looks upon a woman as his daughter when she is not," said Lady Glengarry venomously. "He may say he does, or she may say he does; but I don't believe it! Besides, my dear, you speak as if Lord Carleton were an old man. He is barely so old as I am." (He was several years younger.) "There is no reason why he should not marry again. Most women would enter readily into matrimony with him." She knew *one* who had been trying to do so in spite of her sanctity for the last five years. It was no wonder she hated Margaret, as she now stood beside Lord Carleton, eagerly describing her plan for the children's amusement, and persuading him to come down stairs and witness their entertainment. He was looking at her with a smile half-sorrowful, half-pleased—as a wearied man, whose youth has all gone long ago, looks on an animated young girl, whose youth is nearly all to come.

"My dear Lady Glengarry," said Lady Fortescue, "believe me, Lord Carleton has his head full of other matters! Besides, his health and spirits are not what they used to be."

"Young women of that sort wind themselves like serpents into the favour of old men. They amuse them—they nurse them. See now! she has just put that sofa cushion behind his head. An insinuating minx! And he is actually laughing heartily!"

Mr. Morton joined the two ladies at this moment. From

the expression of their faces, he guessed the subject of the conversation.

"Miss Hastings seems to be amusing his lordship mightily!"

"I was thinking so," said Lady Glengarry; and then she added with a show of charity, which she was well aware would call forth Mr. Morton's venom, "He is fond of young people, and she is a very lively creature."

"It's a pity she is not pretty!" said Lady Fortescue. "Her eyes are good, but then that very light hair is such a strange contrast. Some people admire it, though. My nephew Arundel says she is like a German angel or saint."

"I should say they don't know much about angels or true saints in those Romish countries," said Lady Glengarry. "She is a sinful young woman, I am sure. An angel! Why, she's not even good-looking!"

"Certainly not!" said the pretty Lady Fortescue.

"*Il ne sert de rien d'être jeune sans être belle, ni d'être belle sans être jeune,*" said the amiable Mr. Morton, glancing from the younger lady to the elder; and from her to the unsuspecting Margaret.

Lady Glengarry went on: "Then, there is that person—the old woman whom Arundel is talking to so eagerly! Now, she is not, either by birth or by spiritual graces, a fit person to direct my nieces, as I find she does in many things. But she's not half so bad as that girl—that Margaret Hastings! Look at her now! Laughing as no Christian could or ought to laugh on a Christmas-day! Her familiarity with my nieces is indecorous enough. Look at her gown!—a rich green velvet—just like Lady Geraldine's."

"Oh, that was a present; I happen to know," said Mr. Morton. "Arundel sent them all three a gown, as a specimen of the manufacture he is carrying on in his new silk mills. He wanted their opinion of the fabric in comparison with French and Italian velvets."

"All the more improper!" exclaimed Lady Glengarry. "He ought to have had the decency to make some distinction between the daughters of a duke and of a parson. What are

they all going to do?" she inquired, seeing a general movement among the guests.

"I think we are to go downstairs to the children, now," said Lady Fortescue. "There is to be acting, or something of that sort. Lady Geraldine is to take a part. Shall we follow them?"

Lady Glengarry rose indignantly. "Follow them?—I?—Follow a multitude to do evil? On the birthday of our Saviour? It is sad enough to know that I am in a house where profane acting is going on; but to be present at it myself—and to see my niece, Lady Geraldine Trevor, degrade herself.—No, Lady Fortescue! I cannot go so far as to lend my countenance to anything of the kind; and I must say that I am surprised you should allow your innocent children to witness such immorality. Play-acting is a snare of Satan! I wish you good evening. I shall retire to my evening devotions. I shall not be missed, I dare say! I wish you good evening, Mr. Morton."

When they entered the oak parlour, they found everything prepared for the exhibition of a *tableau vivant*. There was scarcely any light. The guests were seated in front of a crimson curtain which hung before the oratory, within which there appeared to be a brilliant light. There were a score or so of evening guests. The little Fortescues and some other children were flitting about like gay butterflies from group to group, and everybody seemed occupied in entertaining them—everybody but Lord Carleton, who was pacing the room slowly, and Mr. Arundel Raby, who sat before a pianoforte, apparently looking over music, but, in reality, watching his father. Lord Merle, the Ladies Trevor, and Margaret and James Hastings, were not to be seen; they were engaged in the business of the *tableau*.

"This seems to be a very fine room, Clarissa," said Mr. Morton, as he placed a chair for her, and looked about in the dim light.

"Yes. It's very strange the earl will keep these rooms shut up! The vine room is beyond——"

"Mamma! mamma! Do you know what we are going to

see?" asked one of her ladyship's seven darlings, springing on her lap.

"No, my love.—Hush!—Listen to the music!"

At a given signal Mr. Raby began to improvise an overture for the coming *tableau*. It was a novel and astonishing sort of music to the audience, and they did not half like it; but it kept them silent, and forced them to listen. Lord Carleton ceased pacing to and fro, and took a seat near the musician, with a look of wonder and sympathy in his face.

"That is very fine! What do you call it?" he asked, bending towards Arundel.

"I am trying to imitate something I once heard Beethoven play. The theme he afterwards wrote down as a waltz, and called it '*Schmertz*.'"

Presently the curtain opened, and was looped up on either side, forming a draped frame to a picture.

There was a general murmur of admiration through the room: a rush forward of little feet, and cries of "Oh! Oh! How beautiful! Is it a real picture? How do they do it? What is it about?"

Then whispers of "Hush, hush!" from the elders. "Stand still and look."

"Do you know what it is, Anna, my love?" asked Lady Fortescue of her clever hoyden.

"La, mamma! yes, to be sure. Don't you see what is written up there—in gold letters? I cut them out:

'Here I and sorrow sit,  
Here is my throne—let kings come bow to it.

'SHAKESPEARE.'"

"But what does it mean, Anna?" asked little Tom. "Who is that lady on the ground? I mean, who is Lady Geraldine pretending to be?"

"Oh! I don't know. It's somebody in Shakespeare, and I haven't read Shakespeare yet. I suppose Jacky is meant to be her son. Look at him."

Lady Fortescue hoped nobody heard Anna's confession of ignorance; and began in a low tone to tell her the story of

Lady Constance and Prince Arthur, while she looked at her own pretty boy in the *tableau*.

Such of the company (and they were few) who had ever seen a *tableau vivant*, thought the present by far the best they had ever seen, and all the rest of the well-bred, but unartistic, assemblage could not find words to express their admiration. When the curtain dropped, they forgot the punctilios of provincial grandees, and behaved like eager and excited men and women. Cries of "No, no! Not yet! Let it stay a little longer. Do, pray!" resounded through the room. Mr. Baby, to whom they were addressed, laughed as he raised his voice in reply. "We are immensely flattered by your admiration of our *tableau*; but mortal muscles must have rest. After five minutes you shall see it again;" and, using a manager's privilege, he disappeared behind the curtain; while the cheerful voices of the spectators rose in animated talk.

"The illusion was perfect." "Yes. Did you observe the gauze screen?"—"No."—"I do not know which figure looked the best."—"Oh! Lady Geraldine. What a Constance!"—"Well! I hardly recognised her—her face was so changed! Every feature looked different."—"Such tremendous anger and pride would have made most faces diabolical! Did you notice the strained muscles of the arm that was round the boy? The other figures looked very well—the men especially. What a beautiful suit of chain armour Lord Merle wore! I suppose he was Lewis the Dauphin, in the play?"—"Yes; and Lady Alice was Blanche of Castile."—"Lady Alice looked charmingly in that dress; but she is so beautiful that no dressing improves her—she looks just as well out of a picture."—"Who was that large man who stood for Faulconbridge? How magnificent and bold he looked."—"Mr. Grey, the Rector."—"Ah! he ought to be a Life-guardsman."—"What did you think of Queen Elinor?"—"Capital! I could never have supposed that that girl—so good-natured and simple—could look half so wicked—she looked thoroughly bad."—"Her brother, as the great Salisbury, looked wonderfully handsome and chivalrous. I thought he looked better than

Lord Merle."—"Who were King John and King Philip? Philip looked like a Frenchman."—"I think I know the face."—"Was it Lord Carleton's secretary?"—"Yes; that's the man—He is French."—"King John was Mr. Hastings—Henry Hastings—the Earl of Salisbury's elder brother."—"I did not like *his* face. He looked as bad as Queen Elinor."—"I suppose the Hastingses are a *talented* family."—"They are an ambitious one."—"Speak lower. They know how to make themselves useful in the right quarter."—"Lord Carleton! yes, I see. His behaviour has been very strange all the evening. Don't let him see you watching him."—"Oh! he sees nobody. He is examining the ceiling."—"Indeed! was *this* really the very room?"—"Look at him now! He wants somebody. How he looks at every face! He is speaking to himself. Did you hear what he said?"—"I only heard the word *Margaret*."—"That is the name of Miss Hastings, the Queen Elinor?"—"Yes. There goes that little old lady. She is taking his arm. What is she saying to him? She is leading him away—who is she? One always sees her here."—"She lives here—was the late countess's governess—knows all the family secrets."—"Ah! do you see? He won't go. How wild he looks!"—"What a very awkward thing!"—"Here comes Mr. Raby. Take no notice."—"Now for the picture again."—

The curtain was removed, and once more the very effective group within the oratory was displayed. As soon as Arundel saw that all eyes were intent on it, he passed behind the spectators, and joined his father and Miss Price. The former was muttering to himself, and the only word they could distinguish was "*Margaret*." They exchanged rapid glances, and then Miss Price's eyes filled with tears. "What shall we do with all these people? How very unfortunate."

"Hush!" whispered Arundel; "they must be kept amused. We must get him to his own apartment."

"He will not go. Try him."

"Father, I want to speak with you a moment. Will you step into the next room with me?" asked Arundel, in an affectionate tone.

Lord Carleton seemed to apprehend his meaning, and said, with a flash of cunning in his eye: "You want to get me out of this room. I won't go." And drawing himself up with an angry air, he turned away, and walked towards the *tableau*. He began making observations about it to the person nearest him, who chanced to be Mr. Morton. He had been observing the earl attentively since he came into the house that morning, and was speculating on the prospect of being soon legal guardian to the Ladies Trevor.

"They will make a splendid couple. Don't you think so, Morton?"

"Do you mean Merle and Lady Alice?"

"Yes, whom should I mean? I've been thinking how well Shakspeare describes them. Do you remember what he says?"—

'If lusty love should go in quest of beauty,  
Where should we find it fairer than in Blanch?  
If zealous love should go in search of virtue,  
Where should we find it purer than in Blanch?  
If love ambitious sought a match of birth,  
Whose veins bound richer blood than Lady Blanch?  
Such as she is in beauty, virtue, birth,  
Is the young Dauphin every way complete.'—

Yes, no one can deny *that*, I flatter myself!" he concluded, gazing with more than ordinary pride on his son, as he stood holding, lover-like, the hand of Lady Alice in the picture.

"A very handsome couple, certainly!" replied Mr. Morton. "But if I were you, Carleton," he continued, lowering his voice, and watching his victim stealthily, "I should not encourage the visits of the young man who personates Salisbury. He is really a very fine fellow, and, *entre nous*, your fair ward yonder knows it."

A sudden cloud obscured the earl's eye. Arundel stood close at his elbow, and Mr. Morton saw that he had overheard his insinuation. The young man did not look towards him, but watched the *tableau*. Just then, Lady Alice, either being unable to keep her eyes motionless any longer, or from some other cause, gave a slight, rapid glance towards the noble

figure of the armed knight, William Longsword; and, as fate would have it, at that precise instant, he moved his eyes from Lady Constance, and looked at the lovely Blanch of Castle. It was but for the twentieth part of a second, but it called up a vivid blush in the lady's cheek. Lord Merle saw it, and neglecting his business in the *tableau*, he looked from her to find the cause of the blush. When he saw the face of James Hastings, he remained looking at him. Arundel clapped his hands, and the curtain fell.

"They are getting tired. They can't keep themselves motionless any longer," he said in a careless manner. "They have done very well, have they not?" He appealed to his father.

To his great distress he saw that Lord Carleton was murmuring to himself, and that his eyes were wandering wildly. Mr. Morton looked on, with an unmistakable appearance of fear. He drew back, but tried to conceal his alarm.—"Shall I? Whom shall I fetch?" He spoke in a terrified whisper, and looked at his nephew.

"Command yourself, uncle!" Arundel replied in the same low tone, but with a slight touch of contempt. "Do not draw attention to my father. He will be better presently. If you will be good enough to talk to some of those ladies." Then seeing Miss Price close to him, he spoke rapidly to her. "Stop them from bringing lights here! Keep the room as dark as you can!—No one else has seen. Quick! Tell Merle and Margaret what is the matter. They must contrive to get him away. He will go with them. Quick, dear Miss Price! For God's sake don't let us make him the county talk."

Miss Price moved away. Lord Carleton had sunk into a chair, and Arundel stood before him, as if in conversation, so that he almost hid his father from the guests. The very little light in the room favoured the concealment of his strange gestures and expression of face. He was muttering fearful curses in a semi-articulate tone. Suddenly he raised his head, and found himself face to face with Arundel.

"You too? Who are you?" he whispered through his shut teeth. "What did you bring me here for?—I know



the place. I know *they* are all mad!" waving his hand towards the company. "But I am not mad. *You* are, though!—I can see it in your eye. You can't hide it from me. I know the signs—because!—come close!"—And then with a look of savage cunning, that made his son's blood cold, he whispered—

"*I* had a mad father!—*You* had a mad father too. I'm looking for mine. He was here just now—has a brown beard, and eyes like a vulture. I've got *this* for him!" And opening his coat he showed something in an inner pocket—it was a pistol.

Arundel controlled every nerve and muscle. He smiled and nodded significantly; then glanced round to the company. They were all talking and laughing gaily. No one was watching them—except, perhaps, Mr. Morton in the distance.

"We must not let them see!" he said confidentially.

"No, no!" said Lord Carleton, still keeping his hand on the weapon, and his glistening eye on his son. "It is loaded—both barrels—I shall only want one."

"Whom do you want *that* for?" asked Arundel in the same low tone.

"For my wicked father. All mad fathers should be shot! If you're afraid, I'll shoot yours for you!"

"You had better button up your coat. Girls are afraid of pistols. Here comes Margaret Hastings."

No sooner had Arundel pronounced that name, than a sudden change came over his father. He rose from his chair, and repeated "Margaret Hastings!" in a tone of passionate tenderness. The talking and laughing in the room continued, but some persons in the company began to watch the earl—though they could not hear his words.

"Have you come at last, Margaret, my love?" he said, taking her hand and kissing it. "I have waited a weary while. I wanted to show you this room;—'tis my mother's bedroom. It is to be your private room, you know, and shall be called the oak parlour again—as it used to be when I was a child, and M. de Merville worked here. Will you like this

room for yourself, Margaret?—when you are Countess of Carleton?” He spoke like a lover.

“Speak to him!” whispered Arundel. “Courage!”

“Yes. I like this room very much,” said Margaret, looking round on the walls and ceiling. “Shall we examine the carving nearer?” Lord Carleton rose, and with all the grace of his youth, offered an arm to Margaret. Many eyes were on them. Margaret appeared calm and collected after exchanging a glance with Arundel.

“Let us look at the carving on the door,” she said. They made a few steps towards it; when suddenly Lord Carleton stopped, seemed to recollect himself, and said:

“No. I will not go out of this room to-night. I have something to do here.” He dropped Margaret’s arm, and walked back to the chair he had left. Again, rapid telegraph signs passed between Margaret and Arundel. She sat down near the earl, saying—“They have another *tableau* ready. Will your lordship like to see it?”

“By all means. Let no pains be spared to amuse these ladies and gentlemen!” he replied, thrusting his hand within the breast of his coat. Arundel noticed the action, and without a moment’s hesitation, gave the signal for withdrawing the curtain. Instantly, all eyes and thoughts were busy with the new picture, and the tones of admiration were general.

“Ah!—That is lovely. It is Griselda giving up her child. Lady Alice looks more beautiful than usual, if that be possible!”—“Oh! I can read that old English writing. I cut out the letters.” And the treble voice of Anna Fortescue was heard declaiming Chaucer’s verse—

“But at the last to speken she began,  
And mekely she to the sergeant praid,  
So as he was a worthy gentil man,  
That she might kiss her child, or that it deid;  
And in her barme this litel child she laid,  
With full sad face, and gan the child to blisse,  
And lulled it, and after gan it kisse.”

Poor Margaret could scarcely see the sweet picture for the mist of dread which floated before her eyes. She looked at

Lord Carleton. He sat staring at the picture with a sardonic smile, and talking to himself:

"My mother. She was as gentle and as cowardly. She should have used *this* to her husband!" To Margaret's horror, she saw him draw the pistol from its concealment for a moment, and then thrust it back hurriedly, as if fearing it would be seen. When he looked at her she had assumed her usual air. She controlled her voice so as to say cheerfully:

"You have no idea how difficult it is to remain without the slightest motion for so long a time." The curtain fell, and after five minutes was withdrawn again. During that time, which seemed like a year to Margaret, she contrived to exchange a few words with Arundel.

"No. I'm *not* afraid. I'll get it from him. You must take these people away." As she looked at Arundel, she felt the most exquisite pity for him.

"This is too much for him!" she thought. "Thank God, his mother is not alive!"

Meanwhile, Lord Carleton seemed looking for some one in the company. "Where is Merle?" he asked aloud.

"See. There he comes!" she said. "Do you want him?"

At this moment Arundel's voice rose above every other, saying, "The ball-room is ready. Lady Alice Trevor expects us there. Let the youngest lead the way."

Immediately there was a rush of children, and a quick procession of ladies and gentlemen, through the door. Lord Merle and his brother appeared to mingle with, and direct the crowd; but as soon as they had seen the last person depart from the room, they returned to it, shut the door, and fastened it. François de Merville appeared from the oratory, and Maddox stood suddenly behind Lord Carleton's chair. He sat looking at Lord Merle with a fond, proud smile; and had not noticed the departure of the guests. Margaret sat beside him, very pale, but with resolute, compressed lips. Seeing his countenance soften at sight of his son, she stood up quietly before him, and placing her hands on his two shoulders, she kissed his forehead.

He looked up in surprise. "Can I do anything for you?" he asked, kindly.

Margaret fixed her pure, powerful eyes on his, and replied, in a firm tone,

"Yes; give me that pistol you have in your pocket."

He burst into a wild laugh, and tried to shake her hands off. She pressed the heavier, and never removed her eyes from his.

"Lord Carleton, give me that pistol!" she said, in a tone of gentle command. He trembled beneath her gaze—he hesitated.

"Are you Margaret—*my first love*?"

"No; I am her niece. Recollect yourself! I am Margaret Hastings. This is Frank—this Arundel—your sons. You are not well, dear Lord Carleton." His eyes sunk beneath her gaze. She spoke earnestly. "You would be very sorry to do mischief.—Give me that pistol."

He drew out the pistol, and put it into her hand.

"Thank you!" she said. "Will you like to retire to your room? François is here?"

The earl rose from his seat, passed his hand over his eyes, and then looked about him.

"I am better now," he said. "Thank you, Margaret, leave me, my dear children. Do not be anxious on my account. I feel better; but I will not return to the company to-night. Excuse me to them, my dear Frank; I shall stay here awhile. Good night, Margaret! you are a good, brave girl. You need never fear a poor——" His pale lips quivered;—he felt his hands clasped by his sons.

"Good night, my boys! good night. God bless you!" They obeyed his gesture, and retired with Margaret. Maddox and François had left the room by the door in the oratory. But François stole back, and concealed himself in the curtain that had been used for the *tableaux*.

The two brothers, with Margaret, went to the vine room, and paused to recover strength as soon as they had closed the door. They looked at each other's pale faces by the light of a brilliant chandelier; but Margaret only saw Arundel's.

"Is it safe to leave him?" asked Lord Merle, in a low tone.

"Yes!" said Margaret; "François will not lose sight of him. He is in the room."

She sunk on a chair, and looked furtively at the pistol in her hand.

Arundel took it from her.

"What are you going to do with it?" she asked, quickly.

"Put it here until I can carry it to its proper place." And he laid it inside a cabinet, turned the key, and put it into his pocket. Then he said, "Merle, we must keep this matter secret as long as we can; not so much for our own sakes as for that of Alice and her sister. Morton becomes their guardian in case——"

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed Lord Merle. "We should lose them. Anything to keep them from his power. Besides, for our own sakes. Margaret, can you play the hypocrite as well as the heroine to-night?"

"I?" She paused. "I can do all you require." Arundel took her hand.

"We shall need your help. You must satisfy Geraldine that all is well. She suspects. My Aunt Fortescue—Mr. Grey—— You must be strong for two hours more, my dear Margaret," he said.

And for two hours more these three young people wore smiling faces, and exerted themselves to entertain the company, and were very sorry for the sudden business which occupied their host. Margaret saw that Lady Geraldine did not believe Lord Carleton was only occupied by unexpected business, and that she watched his sons very attentively, especially when they danced with her sister. Mr. Morton conversed much with Lady Geraldine. James looked handsomer than usual—proud and animated. He watched Lady Alice incessantly—danced with her—and talked with her alone and with others. There was an unnatural gaiety in his manner.

"Poor James!" thought Margaret. "Has he taken more wine than usual to drown thought and make him bold, or do he and Lady Alice understand each other?"

When all the guests were gone, and the inmates of Carleton Castle separated for the night, the three girls were going slowly along the south gallery towards their rooms, when Lady Alice said :

"You two seem worn out!—now I am not at all tired, and yet I have been dancing more than usual;—the children make one childish."

"I think every one of the visitors was satisfied," said Margaret.

"My dear, they were all enchanted. As to our new pupils, we have won them body and soul. By the way, where were you when Geraldine began her improvisation? It was the prettiest version of the 'White Cat' I ever heard. I suppose you were flirting, as usual, with the noble twins? You all three came in trying to look *not guilty*."

"Is that Lord Carleton coming out of the Countess's chamber?" said Lady Geraldine, looking intently at the other end of the corridor. "Your eyes are better than mine, Margaret. Look."

"I think it is," said the latter. "He is going to his rooms. Here is my door!—Excuse me if I do not stay with you to talk of our revels to-night; I am very tired."

"You look very ill, Margaret," said Lady Geraldine. "You undertake too much. Good night!—I shall come and breakfast with you."

"Good night, my worn-out darling," said Lady Alice. And the lovely sisters kissed the cold lips of poor Margaret Hastings. She murmured a "Good night," and shut the door softly upon them.

Now she is alone, and the staved back flood of feeling may rush at once over her heart. At first she is cold, half insensible with fear—fear of she knows not what. Yes, *now* she knows! It is fear for Arundel. The dark enemy is near him, she is sure of it;—he has been terribly shaken by the sight of his father this night.

Margaret stands before the cheerful fire, and tries to warm her hands, while she surveys the events of that day and the

position of those dear to her.—Lord Carleton—she must stay to soothe him. But if he become unmanageable by her? Then, indeed, she need not stay at Carleton—to see Arundel's growing love for Lady Geraldine. "I am not worthy of him; I know it; but still it is hard to bear!—Ah, self again—always self!" and a look of scorn came over Margaret's sad face. "Cannot I love anything in this world generously?—not even Arundel? Can I not feel for him and his most hapless love? Hapless, alas! He will not try to win her love—and he would not, *ought* not, to see any love in her, were it as plain to see as that of James for her sister. God has written the law which forbids marriage to Arundel;—but who made the law which separates my brother from his love? If I were a man, I'd try my strength against such a law as that!—What! outrage friendship for the sake of love? No; James would die rather than injure Frank. Arundel is right—my brother is worthy to found a race!—a race of new aristocrats,—of modern *Best Men*. He will not muse helplessly over the tangled threads of life, as I do.—O life! life!—that I dreamed would be so noble, so free, so beautiful for me and mine!—how poor, crippled, and compulsory it all seems! I cannot see my own way through it now. I will sleep, and look my duty in the face to-morrow!"

Not so, Margaret Hastings!—At that moment a quick rap on the door startled her from her reverie. She opened it. Arundel stood before her, pale and agitated.

"Quick, quick, Margaret!—My father!—he has got another pistol! You must help us to get it from him!—The vine room—come!"

They ran through the long corridor and down the stairs. They reached the oak parlour breathless. They stood before the door which communicated with the vine room, and paused for a moment. Margaret pressed Arundel's hand, and whispered imploringly—

"Don't go in—let me go alone! Remember, I can bear these things better than you."

"I am determined to bear this," he replied. "Hark!"

There was a sound of struggling and altercation within, and Lord Carleton's voice, loud and harsh, cried—"Leave me! I will not be watched!—If you do not go I'll blow your brains out!"

There was another voice, and the rapid movement of feet, and before Arundel could open the door, the report of a pistol resounded through the old rooms.

Margaret shuddered, and then put her arm through Arundel's to lead him away.—He resisted. "No, Margaret; I must know. I can bear the worst better than this suspense."

"He turned the handle of the lock. The door was opened from within, and François issued. In answer to their inquiring looks he replied,—

"It is over!"

"No hope?" asked Arundel.

"None! *Je n'y connais*. But send for a surgeon. Say it was an accident."

One look at Arundel convinced François that he was no longer capable of issuing orders. He tried to support him with Margaret. In vain; the poor young man fell to the floor utterly insensible. Margaret sat down beside him on the floor, and lifted his head on her knees. She seemed to heed nothing but the agonised face beneath her own. She did not look up when the good François spoke to her; she did not hear his murmured words as he left the room:

"*Que le bon Dieu te soulage, pauvre brave cœur de femme! Tu as ton fardeau à toi, pour la vie!*"

\* \* \* \* \*

Margaret heeded not the precautions taken by François and Maddox to keep the servants and other inmates from entering the vine room; she heeded not the whispers and the solemn looks—the coming of the surgeons and the removal of the dead body—but when they came to touch the body which she guarded she waved them back, and commanded them to bring certain remedies, which she suffered no one to administer but herself. When Arundel began to revive, she ordered them to carry him at once to his own apartment.



Within a week afterwards Carleton Castle was deserted. The visitors departed hastily; Lord Merle was called to London to transact his late father's business. The Ladies Trevor went with Lady Glengarry and their new guardian, Mr. Morton. Mr. James Hastings went as Mr. Arundel Raby's deputy to North Ashurst.

The inquest and the funeral had been conducted as quietly as possible, and when they were over the house was shut up, all but a few rooms, which were occupied by Mr. Raby and his "keepers," as the villagers called François, Maddox, Miss Price, and Margaret Hastings.

The patient recognised no one; but he was tractable with Margaret, and talked to her with impassioned eloquence of his love for Geraldine Trevor. Sometimes, indeed, he mistook Margaret for his love, and tortured her with his looks. She endured all this because Dr. Wynn, his physician, had decided that her presence was of inestimable benefit. She defended herself bravely against her relations' horror at her employment—against *les bienséances*—against fears for her health—against her own pride and weakness—against everything but her noble friendship for the sufferer, and her promise to his mother on her death-bed.

"No, James," she wrote, "I cannot leave Arundel until this dark cloud be overpast. Once for all, I care not for what any people—even those I love—say of my conduct, when my conscience upholds me before God, and its voice says, 'Bear on to the end in what you do now.' The world? Shall the world and its customs stand between us and the right? I have not learned my duty to God and man *so*."

"To you I may say that my health suffers, that my heart suffers, terribly in this trial. But for health—I have an immense fund of that—I can afford to be a little ill. What my heart sickens at I cannot tell you—at least not all. Believe that I do not lie on a bed of roses,—that my work here is harder than I could have imagined. But courage! Come and see me. Meet Dr. Wynn here next week. He will tell

us how soon we may expect a favourable change. Pray for us, and may God bless you!

"Your own sister,

"MARGARET."

Two months later Arundel Raby was in his right mind. He was very feeble in body, for this violent attack had reduced him to a state of dangerous debility. Dr. Wynn ordered him to the south of France. Lord Merle came down to Carleton to travel with him; he did not know that this attack had been different from his brother's former ones; there was no good in telling the whole truth, Dr. Wynn thought.

"Margaret," said Arundel, the day before his journey, for the first time noting a great change in Margaret, "I fear that this last illness has had something about it more painful to my kind nurse than——"

"Hush, hush! my dear friend!" she said. "It is over now. Do not let us talk about it." And even the brave Margaret could not subdue a shudder at the recollection of those love scenes, which had been the cruellest pain instead of the glory of her life.

"Forgive me, Margaret, all the unkindness—all the *madness*! I remember nothing."

"Arundel, spare me! I cannot bear that you should forget our compact and my privilege as your friend, to tend, to soothe, to bear with you when the hour of darkness comes. Forget it as much as you can, now that it has passed away. Go to Nice and get strong!"

He went abroad—and came back after a year, strong for the world's work once more.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### MARRIAGE—LOVE, AND NO LOVE.

WITHIN three years after the death of Frederick, sixth Earl of Carleton, Francis, the seventh Earl, became the husband

of the Lady Alice Trevor. They were married in London, and departed for Paris on a lovely day early in June. All the retainers of the noble couple were feasted on the occasion, and were thoroughly satisfied with the marriage. In the village of Carleton the memory of the late earl's death damped the mirth here and there; but the joy-bells of the old church rang out with a furious glee, as if they defied all tolling and knelling for the future. Mr. Grey, the young clergyman there, was so annoyed at last by the incessant clangour close to his house, that he was very nearly issuing Othello's orders to "stop that d——d bell," but thought better of it, and went for a walk instead.

About a mile from the village he met the postman.

"One letter for you, sir."

"Have you any for the castle?"

"Yes, sir; three for Miss Hastings."

"I am going there; I will carry them for you, and then you will be in time for the cricket-match."

"You are very good, sir. Thank you!"

Mr. William Grey put the letters for Miss Hastings into his pocket without looking at their addresses. He might be a blockhead; but he was a gentleman, and scorned to indulge his impertinent curiosity. His own letter was from James Hastings. It was concise:

"LONDON, *June*, 182—.

"MY DEAR GREY,—Can you give me a bed on Friday night? I shall be at the castle some time in the day. I want to see Margaret. This close attendance on poor Miss Price is probably the cause of the change you notice. The dear old lady cannot linger much longer, I hear. When she is gone, I must have Margaret away from that melancholy place. I think I shall take her abroad. More of my plans when we meet.

"Yours affectionately,

"JAMES HASTINGS."

The Rev. William Grey was not given to soliloquy, there-

fore he did not confide to the trees and deer in the park the train of thought suggested by this note, as he walked, with his usual, stalwart stride, up to the castle. But he struck his oaken stick on the ground several times with tremendous force; a sure sign that he was engaged in the laborious office of thinking.

Before he went up to the hall-door he walked round to the south side of the building to see how the workmen were getting on with the repairs and improvements, which the young earl was so anxious to have completed before he brought his bride home. The men were all away, making holiday in honour of the wedding. The external works were very forward. The magnificent new conservatory, which had been erected on the ground where the dining-hall and marble saloon had stood, was now completely glazed; and Joseph Rosemary and his satellites had been busy within it already. Adjoining the conservatory was the old oak parlour. The fair bride had particularly requested that all its carving should be carefully preserved, and that suitable furniture should be added, as she wished to make it her usual sitting-room. The young earl readily consented to this. Neither he nor his brother had seen the room since the events recorded in the last chapter; but he did not wish to have unwholesome memories kept sacred as heirlooms in his ancestral home. Fearing that the beautiful marble saloon might awaken horrible fancies in many minds, he had it pulled down, and set up again at his house in London by competent hands.

Mr. Grey entered the oak parlour by the bay-window, and was so occupied with admiring the new *old*-furniture, and the renovated look of everything, that he did not perceive Margaret Hastings, who was sitting in the oratory, until she spoke to him.

He started at the sound of her voice, blushed, and blundered out, "What can you be doing here?"

"Precisely what you seem to be doing. Taking advantage of the absence of the noisy workmen to admire their work. How do you like it?"

"Vastly."

"*Vastly*?—Ah! That's a word of Carlotta's. I do not like anything that is fashionable—not even words."

"*Very much*, then. But, Miss Margaret, if you do not like what is the fashion, our new Countess of Carleton cannot please you. Even Carlotta says she is a little too extravagant in her fashionable follies."

"She is a duke's daughter, an earl's bride, a rich heiress, and the greatest beauty in England. Is not all that enough to turn a young woman's brain—just a little?"

"Perhaps. But I know something more likely to turn a young man's."

"What is that? Newmarket?"

"No. Love."

"Indeed!—Ah! That's a vulgar complaint I know nothing about. Is not this new organ beautiful? Listen."

"A very fine tone. What makes you so cheerful this morning? Is Miss Price better?"

"Yes—much better. She had a good night; is asleep again now, and I came away for a little air; but stopped here to try the organ, and look about. What a lovely day! I suppose the bride and bridegroom are on their way to Dover."

"I suppose so. Would it not do you good to take a turn on the terrace? It is quite warm there."

"I should like it very much. Let us go."

Happy William Grey! With Margaret Hastings on his arm, he walked up and down that old terrace, more blessed than its owner, though with his new-made bride seated in the carriage beside him.

They had noted all the repairs and admired the conservatory, and, as Mr. Grey had no conversational talent, they began to be silent. Margaret, as usual, when alone with him, busied herself with her own thoughts. At last he said something which she did not hear, and blushing, partly at her own impolite abstraction, partly at the subject of her thoughts, she said:

"I beg your pardon. Will you repeat what you said?"

"I said—Oh! never mind what I said. It does not matter."

"But it *does* matter, though. I see you are hurt. Will you pardon my rudeness, dear Mr. Grey? You must not think I do not care for what you say to me. Like most silent people, whenever you *do* speak, it is to the purpose. I should like to hear what you said." And Margaret looked up into his face with a smile so kind, that William Grey took courage once more, and said distinctly:

"What I said *was* to the purpose, this time, Margaret. I should have said it long ago, but that I dared not; and now I don't know why I dare. But it shall be said. I shall never love any woman but you, Margaret. I have loved you ever since you were a child. I shall always love you as long as I live. I am not a clever fellow, but I am not the fool that some people take me for. I am not such a fool as to be afraid of a good woman because she is cleverer than I am. If she would only be my wife, and let me try to make her happy! Margaret! Will you?"

The large frame of the young man trembled with his emotion—his voice lost its force, and his pale face wore such an earnest, beseeching look, that Margaret could not doubt his sincerity; though, truth to say (and shame on her as a woman), she had not guessed that his love for her was stronger than their old boy-and-girl liking. Taken thus by surprise, she was embarrassed, blushed—hesitated. William Grey grew bolder, and took both her hands in his. Tears stood in his honest eyes, as he bent down and kissed the bright hair on her drooping head, murmuring,

"Dear Margaret. I love you so!"

She retreated a step, and withdrew her hands.

"No, no!" she said, gently shaking her head. "You must not talk of love to me, William Grey. You have made a mistake. I did not guess this, or I might have prevented it."

He made an impatient movement, denying both assertions. "I should only have loved you the more. Is there no hope? In time, perhaps?"

"None—not if we live to be a hundred."

He coloured vividly; he was sensitive—poor Mr. Grey!

"Well! perhaps you are right to be *sure* of that. I was a fool to hope that you could ever love such a common-place, stupid fellow as I am. You must have plenty of clever lovers."

"Not one."

"I have no right to ask; but I should like to know why you are so certain that you could never come to like me?" And he grew pale again.

"You *have* no right to ask," she said, "but I will tell; because I like you too well to allow you to suppose that I do not feel honoured by your love. The love of a true-hearted man is an honour to any woman. I am grateful—very grateful! But,—William Grey,"—she tried to look steadily at him—"I love—have long loved—another."

"Ah!"

"My love is not returned. Is hopeless!" Her eyes fell. "Then it will cease one day!" he said, in a low tone.

"Never! Do not talk of it. If it were to cease, I should no longer be the Margaret you know. It is part of my character—of my whole life."

A new light seemed to break on the young man's mind. He became energetic.

"Margaret. I guess how the matter is! Nay, I will speak no name. But—think. If you give yourself up to this feeling it will make your life miserable. No good can come of it."

"No good to me, perhaps."

"Struggle against it. I do not speak for my own sake; I cannot bear to think that you are to be sacrificed thus. You, who would be so happy as a wife and mother."

"Sacrifice!" "Wife and mother!" Are women never sacrificed who are wives and mothers?"

"Your life would not be sacrificed if you could *marry* the man whom you love."

"And by God's help it shall not be sacrificed, though I

cannot. It shall be nobly used, William Grey! Ay, and in spite of the suffering and the solitude, my life shall have its full share of happiness. Do not look at me so, dear friend! You will keep my secret?"

"Ah! you may trust *me*," he said, sadly.

"You will love some one else as a wife; but you must not give me up as a friend!" And she gave him her hand. He kissed it reverently.

"Margaret, I will speak no more of my love. But as a friend, if at any time I can serve you, or those dear to you, remember that I would lay down my life for you. All that is worth anything in me I owe to you, as a boy and as a man. You have taught me how, with my small powers, I could best work in the profession to which I was forced. Without you to guide and advise me, I might have been a curse to my parish! Give you up, Margaret? God forbid!"

Margaret pressed his hand, and murmured—"Go now! I cannot bear it!" He obeyed her. She looked after him as he went, and said within herself, "Would to God I could have loved you, William Grey!"

Suddenly the marriage bells sounded softly on the air, from the distant village, and she turned her thoughts to the ceremony of that morning. "I ought to have letters! Surely they would write to me." She was about to go in search of some information about the postman, when she saw Mrs. Green, whom the reader may remember as Ann, the housemaid at Sunny Bank, coming towards her, leading her little girl Susan.

"Good morning, Miss Margaret! I am glad to hear Miss Price is so much better. I have brought Susan to show you the new frock you gave her to wear to-day. It is her *wedding-frock*, she says."

"It looks very pretty; you have made it well," said Margaret, examining the garment carefully. "What are those letters?"

"What a head I have, to be sure!"—giving them to Miss Hastings—"the thought of the wedding and the new frock



put it out of my head again! Why, I met Mr. Grey looking very flurried, just now, and walking along like mad; he stopped me, and told me to give you these letters, which he had forgotten."

"I must go and read them," said Margaret. "If I am wanted, I shall be in the oak parlour. I wish to know as soon as Miss Price is awake." Thus saying, she turned away and entered the room by the window.

She did not open the letters until she had seated herself, and looked round to make sure that she was alone. After glancing at the directions, she took up one letter, looked at the handwriting attentively, then at the seal, and put it into her bosom. Taking up one of the others, she opened it, and read as follows:

"DEAR MARGARET,—As you *will* not come to my marriage, and be edified by that imposing ceremony, I must follow the dictates of my heart, and write you a few words of farewell. Henceforth we shall meet but seldom. I am going to devote myself to the fashionable world, or rather, to reign there;—*that* is the life for which I feel most adapted on becoming Countess of Carleton. I shall like it; Frank will like it. All men love to see their female belongings admired and envied. I could not settle down to what you and Geraldine call domestic pleasures. I am a beauty, and was brought up a Puritan; and therefore love admiration and dissipation. I am a woman of high rank and large fortune, and *of course*, can do what I wish in all things.

"What do you mean by those hints in your last letter about 'physical and moral health'—'empty frivolities of fashion'—'*triste métier de femme à la mode*'? They do not touch me. Frank and I mean to lead a very happy life; but as we are 'sociable sprites,' we shall live with our kind, and not in solitude. One thing let me say, my dear girl. Any change in me that years may bring (and years *will* change us all, I suppose), will never affect my feeling for you or yours. A thousand circumstances will separate us; my marriage—your own—things we cannot control; but, remember, the name of

Hastings will ever be dear to me, as it should be to every Raby. I accept my husband's debts of gratitude with his hand, and beg you to command, in future, for any member of your family, the help and service of

"Your affectionate friend,

"ALICE TREVOR."

Margaret's eyes overflowed with tears as she read this letter a second time. Then she let it fall on her lap, and sat, with folded hands and fixed eyes, gazing into the garden below the terrace. Her theories of life and love for her friends, were all being destroyed. And that other theory about her own life, which was not to be beautiful, but useful; and her own love, which was not to be *happy*, but steady and contented—was that destroyed also? She did not know—she would not consider *that*, now. Let that retire out of sight—out of thought—while she gives herself up to a careful survey of the facts (or what appear to her to be facts) forced painfully on her mind by this letter.

"This marriage cannot come to good! Lady Alice does not love Frank—I mean Lord Carleton. I have long suspected it. This letter convinces me. She loves—yes, I am sure she loves—my brother James. And he—he loves—has long loved, nobody else in this world—but Lady Alice. Poor James! Ay, poor indeed! Oh, that I had been a man and in your place! I would have spoken, come what come would. Perhaps the world might have counted one more instance of disobedience to its conventional absurdities in obedience to the grand laws of God in man's heart. As Arundel says, 'We must act according to the highest laws, and take the consequences; they *must* be better than the consequences of any other line of conduct.' Lady Alice, too—poor Lady Alice! One must not even pity you nor weep with you! Woman's pride and world's pride alike forbid you to mourn the wrong done you by your silent lover. You will place your hand on the wound in your heart, and say with a smile, 'All is sound there.' And, this is what the world calls a well-assorted

marriage! We shall hear it applauded on all hands. Congratulations without end!

"Geraldine—sweet Geraldine!—you should have prevented it; but, alas! *your* eyes were blind, *your* tongue was tied. And what have *you* to say to Margaret Hastings, in the midst of your sorrow?"

She opened the other letter that lay in her lap, and read these words:

"I am over-excited, fatigued, dearest Margaret. I cannot fulfil my promise, and write 'a minute account of everything.' It touches me too closely. Alice is my second self.

"I have had a return of the blood-spitting to-day, but have said nothing, because I am determined to be present at the marriage. After it is over, I am coming to you. I want air, and quiet, and time to think. Above all I want a friend. When Alice is gone, what can I do but lay my head on your bosom, and look into your eyes for comfort? I shall be with you on the evening of the marriage-day. I have told no one but Alice that I mean to go to Carleton. I shall enjoy helping you to deck the castle for its mistress. How lovely she is! And he, how happy! They are well matched. I must leave off. God bless you, Margaret!

"Yours ever,

"GERALDINE TREVOR."

Margaret mused over this letter more sorrowfully than over the other. The fit of musing ended in a certain line of poetry,—

"'Ah me! alas! pain ever, ever, for ever?'"

Where did I hear that? I remember! 'Prometheus Unbound.' Geraldine read it. But the sufferer became victorious over agony! My father loved Archbishop Whitgift's motto, *Vincit qui patitur.* It is good. But Arundel's is better."

Here she took the third letter from her bosom, kissed it softly, and looked at the seal, murmuring the inscription,

*"Fais ce que je dois advenir que pourra."* Then carefully unfolding it, she read as follows:

"Marguerite des Marguerites! My pearl of pearls! Why have you not written to me this many a day? Is it as I fear? Is our dear old lady so seriously ill that you have no time for unnecessary letter-writing? In this fear, I have resolved to go down and see her and you as soon as my brother's marriage is over. I cannot leave him before, there is so much business to be done with lawyers and agents, in which my opinion and my autograph signatures are wanted. What a vast system of absurdity is this of our English property law! Frank and I are equally amazed and amused at this monument of the wisdom of our ancestors; only *he* is an eldest son—and, therefore, born in the original sin of respect for the powers that be, and he thinks there may be a great deal of good in the old system. As if *that* were the question! It is a happy thing for you that you are a poor girl, and not a great landed proprietor. Whenever you offend me, I shall produce from my pocket a certain legal document (which I have reserved for the purpose), and make you listen while I read it aloud. The very thought of these things is stupefying! *Passons à autre chose!*

"You ask for an account of the marriage. Ungifted with second sight, I cannot describe perfectly the events of tomorrow; but a few things I may venture to predict. My brother and his bride will be the most beautiful couple in the kingdom. The Bishop of — will look very dignified at the altar, and as unlike an early Christian bishop as the pomps, vanities, and good living of this world can make him. The company of friends and relatives will be splendid, graceful, gay, high-born, low-thoughted, and unworthy of the occasion—with a few exceptions. One will think only of the bride and her future; and another will rejoice with the bridegroom—while he will not be able to resist speculating about the present marriage-law, and whether it really is the best that could be devised for the welfare of society. He, as you know, is an unbiassed thinker on the matter, having no more to do with the marriage-laws himself than he has with the laws

against witchcraft. I shall not attempt to tell you how Mr. Morton will look when he gives the bride away, or how Lady Glengarry——

"I was interrupted yesterday by a visit from James. He is prevented from being present at the wedding by some important business at North Ashurst. He talks of going to see you on his way there; says you are out of health. Can that be true? I was selfishly depending on your invariable health and spirits to help me out of a state of depression which I feel coming on. When Frank and Alice are gone to the Continent and Lady Geraldine is with Lady Glengarry, I should naturally turn to my quietest home—with Margaret Hastings at Carleton. I thought if my forebodings were groundless, we might be happy awhile together, and minister to our old friend, and restore her to health. If my forebodings were true—where on earth should I hide my head from the cowardly and the mocking but with my heart's sister, Margaret? But if you are ill, I must not risk this trial to your nerves. I must seek an abode elsewhere. François will accompany me—and Maddox. If I feel better, you will see me a few days after the marriage. I *must* see you, my dear girl, and Miss Price too; though it would be unsafe to stay under the circumstances. Like the sailor bound on a dangerous and unknown voyage, who fears he may never return, I would fain take a last look at all those I love while yet close enough to the land to see their faces and hear their loving voices. Do not wait until I arrive at Carleton—I *may not be able* to go; but write and tell me how you are, and that you always love your affectionate friend,

"ARUNDEL."

With blanched cheek, compressed lips, and eyes closed, as if to shut out some dreadful object, poor Margaret remained a long time motionless. The sunny air, the hum of bees, the distant music of the marriage bells—the joy in others' happiness, the pity for another's pain—all small, all great things that had soothed her troubled mind when she read those other letters, had no power to soothe her *now*. This grief was

her own heart's grief—this pang was her secret and peculiar suffering, that no stranger meddled with, that no earthly power could relieve. Could she have put into words what passed within her then, they would have resembled these:

“‘Ah me, alas! pain ever, ever, for ever!’

Awhile since those words came softly to my memory—*now* they are written on my heart in fire. Poor, weak, selfish heart! Quick! quick! Beat away the short time allowed thee for throbbing with thy own sorrow. The hour draws nigh when thou must suffer and be strong—ay, and be silent, too. Up, up, heart of mine! The battle-day is at hand once more! Courage. *Fais ce que tu dois adviennne que pourra.* It is for thy self-elected lord thou must do and bear! Be true to thy honourable love, and thou wilt go bravely through the fight, and preserve him in safety for the world's blessing and thy own.”

She stood up—she opened her eyes, but closed them again quickly, for they had looked right on the spot by the window where so many years ago she had been frightened by the apparition of that beautiful face. The self-same ivy-wreath seemed to be waving against the glass, and the face—yes—the same loved, melancholy face was gazing in on her. “I must not indulge these fancies,” she said aloud, as she passed her hand over her eyes. “I must *do* something. Stay! They are *all* coming—perhaps to-day. And I am housekeeper. There! go and do small duties, and forget great ones awhile.”

## CHAPTER V.

JAMES HASTINGS.

“He who hath never warred with misery,  
Nor ever tugged with fortune and distress,  
Hath had n' occasion and no field to try  
The strength and forces of his worthiness.”

DANIEL.

MARGARET never considered herself in the light of a heroine; therefore she gave her orders about dinners and bedrooms for

Lady Geraldine and her servants, and Mr. Raby and his servants, without being at all aware that such things were undignified, and out of keeping with great griefs and high aims. She had a feminine talent for arranging and ruling a domestic establishment, and it was now her duty, as housekeeper, to exercise this talent in Carleton Castle.

I may as well explain how it happened that my Aunt Margaret Hastings, became housekeeper there, in her twenty-fourth year. After the painful death of the sixth earl, Audrey declared that her nerves were "so shook" that it was morally impossible for her to live in that great dreary place any longer; and Joseph Rosemary, taking advantage of the "shook" state of her nerves, persuaded her to marry him, and live in a cosy, cheerful little house in the village of Carleton, which their united savings kept up in what the neighbours called a very genteel style.

The young earl was at no loss for a housekeeper. He had often heard his mother say, that an educated gentlewoman should take charge of such a house as Carleton Castle; and telling his steward that he should engage a housekeeper himself, he at once wrote to Miss Price, and with affectionate delicacy requested her acceptance of the office, with two hundred a year as a salary. The old lady thanked her "dear child" for his thoughtfulness and generosity, and accepted the office. She was "still young enough to discharge most of its duties herself," she said; "and Margaret Hastings would help her with the rest."

After a year or two, Miss Price gave up the hope of seeing Margaret happily married; and knowing that she had no means of support but the allowance made her by her brothers, or the hospitality of her friends and relations, she, like a kind and prudent friend, began to think about Margaret's independence, in a monetary sense—a thing which, truth to tell, had not troubled Margaret herself much.

"My dear," she said one day, "have you thought about your future income?"

"No. What should I think about it?"

"You must think about earning it. You can't live with a married brother or sister."

"Oh, no; I shall live with James."

"He will marry."

"I don't think he will."

"You must, nevertheless, make yourself independent by doing something for money. It is the best thing for an unmarried woman."

"I don't know enough for a governess."

"And I know too much to let you be one."

"What must I do then?"

"How would you like to be my assistant here while I live, and succeed me?"

Margaret took her old friend's hand and kissed it, while one of her deep blushes spread over her face and neck; but she did not speak. Miss Price paused awhile, and said:

"I think you love this place, and its sweet and sorrowful memories, and you would not like to leave it."

"I should never feel at home anywhere else, *now*," replied Margaret, distinctly. "I am useful to you always, and I may be useful again to others whom we love—though may God forbid that!"

They understood each other, and no more was said on the matter, until Miss Price one day showed her young friend a letter from Lord Carleton, or as they still sometimes called him, Frank, in which he assured them both that he and his future wife, Lady Alice Trevor, would like their dear friend Margaret Hastings to succeed to the office of housekeeper at Carleton, if she really desired to do so, which they thought "a most hermit-like desire in so charming a person," who "might make a good match if she did not so heartily despise all manner of men."

Margaret smiled as she folded the letter and returned it to Miss Price.

"How good you are," she said, kissing her. "So that matter is settled; and now I am to be an independent woman. I suppose I am naturally careless, for the idea of being poor



never troubled me. Don't you remember Jeremy Taylor says, speaking of the folly of being a slave to the fear of poverty, 'If we want meat till we die, then we die of that disease, and there are many worse than an atrophy, or consumption.' However, he never tried it himself. To think that I may one day be the housekeeper here!—How strange it seems! I remember so well when I was a child being angry with dear Lady Carleton for wishing you were housekeeper in Mrs. Fenton's place; until she explained to me what her notions of a proper housekeeper for such a castle were. We hover about our fate, and become familiar with it long before it comes to take possession of us."

From that time Miss Price's health declined visibly, and Margaret was the real housekeeper at the castle, and managed the servants well.

She walked through the whole suite of Mr. Raby's apartments, carefully examining everything—the breakfast and dining-room, the small withdrawing-room, and the two rooms appropriated to Maddox and François. These would soon be in order. The workmen had just completed the small spiral staircase which she had ordered to be made as a communication between these rooms and the new conservatory.

She stepped down the stairs into the midst of the blossoming exotics, and stood in front of the pretty new fountain there, which Rosemary had set playing, for the first time, in honour of the day. The effect of the *coup d'œil*, as she looked down the flowering arcade terminating in the graceful arch of the doorway leading to the oratory of the oak parlour was so beautiful, that Margaret remained motionless with admiration for some minutes. Then she examined the mosaic pavement and the different plants as she proceeded slowly towards the oratory. She had, for the time, forgotten her impending troubles. With the happy elasticity of youth her heart was gladdened by the sight of the sunshine and the beautiful flowers.

"They will all be pleased with this," she said to herself. "Arundel will be delighted; I am so glad I thought of that

staircase! Now, if he is confined to his rooms again, he can come down here without being seen. But I must have some lamps put here in case he should turn night into day, as he did before."

She was looking at the roof of the conservatory, and considering in what manner lamps could be best suspended thence, so that she did not see the door of the oratory open, and her brother James appear. He was dusty and travel-stained; his face was worn, weary, and haggard; while in his eye there shone an unnatural excitement. He came very near to his sister before she saw him. She started back for an instant, and the next she ran forward, and threw her arms round his neck.

"My dear, dear brother! What is it? Is Arundel again——"

Even *then* her first thought was of Arundel.

"No," he replied. "Arundel was well when we parted. I come to speak of other things. You must leave this place, Margaret. My sister cannot stay under the Earl of Carleton's roof any longer."

"Why not?—Stay! We may be interrupted here. Come this way." And she led him back to the oak parlour, and closed the doors. She made him take a seat. She sat on his knee as of old, and smoothed his hair with her hands. She kissed him with silent love, and he pressed her to his heart, whispering, in half-choked tones, a few incoherent words:

"Thank God!—*You* are the same. My sweet sister!—All things else are nothing to me now!—All else is lost! But you—you will always be true?"

"James!—my own best brother!—what is it moves you so? You have borne your grief so bravely until now."

"My grief? *You* knew it?" he asked, with surprise. Lovers are always surprised when their secret is known.

"Knew it?—Did I not love you always? Could I be blind to that?"

She pressed him in her arms, and kissed his eyelids softly.

The gentle caress, the warm love, vanquished the young man's reserve.

"Margaret," he said, "I have tried to act rightly. I have suffered much."

"I know you have. But——"

"Ah!" he cried, "you, too, have a *but*. Do you think my suffering was needless?—You?—Speak, Margaret. Tell me;—I have seemed cowardly, weak, unworthy?"

"Nay, James," said his sister, speaking gently, but decidedly. "No one can accuse you of such things. Tell me what has happened to move you thus. Of course you were not present at the marriage?"

James's face turned ashy pale as she pronounced the word "marriage," and he shook his head without speaking.

"What has happened?" she asked again.

After a minute, James recovered a portion of his usual self-possession, and putting Margaret from him, he walked to the window, and inhaled the fresh air. She followed him, and they sat down on the cushions there. He took her hand, and pressed it fondly.

"I am better now," he said. "I will tell you all. It costs me something, you know, to speak of my own matters, even to you. When you have heard me, now, you can judge of the effort I make to speak."

"It will do you good to speak out, dear James."

He spoke as follows:—"Margaret, you know my love; but you do not know that it began when I first saw her; that it has never changed—that I have not sought to change it. 'What need to do so,' I argued; 'it can hurt no one but myself.' It was a delicious pain for a long time. At last, when I knew that Lord Carleton—no! I will still say *my friend*—loved her, that their fathers had both desired the match, and that she had been taught to desire it, then, Margaret, I felt that jealousy, like love, knows no distinction of ranks, and I suffered pangs which you, and no woman, I think, can ever know! At times, too, I fancied that she did not love Merle; that—that—— Then I tore myself

away. I dared not trust myself near her. The terrible class-distinction was my curse!—Why do you look so, Margaret?—Surely I did well? Speak out. What have you to say against me?—I am strong. I can bear any truth.”

“You are strong and good, James,” she replied. “Still I will not give you pain by telling you of mistakes in your conduct when it is too late to amend them.”

“Mistakes!—Ah, Margaret! there speaks the voice of my secret conscience. There *has* been some mistake. I feel that something is wrong; yet I could not act otherwise, in honour!—in friendship! Think of her rank and fortune!—Oh, curse them!—curse them! Would you have had me crush my pride, my sense of honour?”

“I would have had you crush any weakness—*pride* first of all—that impostor, that giant selfishness! Honour can never be crushed by right doing. You were modest—but you were also proud. You must have seen that she loved you.”

James started to his feet, with a flushed cheek. “Well! and if I did see it, could I dare to talk of love to Merle’s future wife—a duke’s daughter?”

“If she loved you, James, if you loved her—*loved*, mark!—not Merle, not any man, should have hindered you from doing her the justice to tell her so. You should have declared your love like a man; you should not have stood back because you were poor, and had no title.”

“Ah! you do not know! You do not understand the world! You are a woman!”

Margaret turned her eyes full on him—there was a tear on her cheek as she spoke from the depth of heart. “It is because I *am* a woman that I know how women feel in these things;—because I am not mixed up with the world’s ways that I can see when they turn aside from God’s ways. Men of the world pay little respect to the chosen of their hearts—(when, God help them! they have any heart left, from ignoble sensuality and the thirst for money and station)—you pay little respect, it seems to me, to a woman, when you wait

to disclose your love until you can show her father that you can afford to spend as much money in useless luxuries as he can. The love that *can* wait in this way, is not very powerful. I care not what public opinion says. I know what nature says. Perhaps the women who inspire such love are not capable of inspiring anything stronger."

James replied: "I agree with what you say, Margaret. But my case was peculiar. I am not a man of the world, in your sense of the term; and you cannot surely class Lady Alice Trevor among the women who are not capable of inspiring a great passion. How could I have acted otherwise than as I have?"

"You should have spoken—if—you thought she loved you."

"Do you think she loved me?" he asked, eagerly.

Margaret's honest eyes said "Yes;" but she paused, and he went on.

"No matter! no matter!—Merle and I were friends."

"All the more reason for your speaking," said Margaret, sadly. "Sooner or later he will discover this love of yours—and what will he feel then?"

"He has discovered it!—He is furious, and we have quarrelled. Yesterday we parted for ever!—Merle and I, Margaret—think of it!"

Margaret burst into tears. "My poor, dear James! Is it so indeed? And I have been talking coldly of your duties! Forgive me, dear! How you must have suffered!" She put her loving arms round him, and kissed his pale cheek till his eye brightened a little. "Tell me," she said, after a while, "how this came to pass? Frank is not suspicious."

"It was that subtle fiend, Morton. He laid a snare for me. I fell into it. Iago-like, he had first set the generous Merle on fire with suspicions, which my conduct confirmed the evening before the marriage. Last night Merle came to my lodging. He taxed me with treachery—said I had tried to win Lady Alice's affection. I denied it. But when he asked more, I could not deny my love. High words passed between

us. Horrible to remember! Merle showed the taint of worldliness. He asked how I 'dared to think of one so far above me?' I spoke out then, and became as angry and unjust as he. In the midst, Arundel came in search of his brother. Merle appealed at once to him, and told all. Arundel behaved nobly! He showed his brother that I did not deserve his accusation. Merle would not retract it. We stood measuring each other with looks of hatred. Ay, Margaret—it came to that!—when Arundel stepped between us, and taking a hand of each, said, 'You two must part now. Friendship is at an end. You both love the same woman! It is a grave misfortune—not a crime. Even if it were, it would not make matters better that you should show each other you are not afraid of pistols,—or of making all those who love you wretched. James Hastings and Frank Raby cannot fight;—they have loved each other too well! Is it not so?' he said, looking from one to the other. We could not speak—in another moment Arundel joined our hands—'Forgive each other, and part,' he said. One of us said, 'I forgive.' It was not Merle. He still looked at me with cold, angry eyes. Then Arundel said to him, 'You must come to Alice—she is ill. Mr. Morton has been with her about the signatures, and he left her in tears.' Merle turned without another word or look, and left the room. He, the privileged lover—the husband of this day! Thus our friendship ends."

"Nay," said Margaret. "You may meet no more, but you cannot cease to love him."

"Not cease to love Lady Alice's husband?" And James started up, as if stung by some violent pain, and smiled bitterly. "You don't know what you talk of! Let me waste no more time in idle words. I came here to take you away with me. I cannot allow my sister to stay in the house of a man who has insulted me. We will go to France, Germany, Italy!—where you will! To-morrow you must be ready, dear Margaret."

Margaret looked steadily at him—then taking his hand gently, she said: "I am sorry to cross your will just now; but I cannot go from this place."

"Not go, Margaret? What is this?"

"Simply that I am a free agent, James. I know it is the custom for women to obey the men of their family. I cannot comply with this custom on the present occasion, my dear brother," she said, calmly.

James looked surprised. "True," he said, "I am neither your husband nor your father, and you are of age. I fear I spoke——"

"As men think they have a right to speak to women who belong to them," interrupted Margaret, smiling. "It is the fault of your education."

"Then you resist my will?" asked her brother, sharply.

"Certainly I do! Don't look at me so, dear James. You are unhappy enough without being angry with your own sister Maggie."

"My own sister Maggie never talked of the rights of woman. She was true to her sex!—a dear, sweet girl! She has grown philosophical and independent, and disdains control and persuasion. She will remain with those who insult and malign her brother. He has no authority over her. Then, good-bye! We will not quarrel, Margaret. Life is becoming cold and desolate. I will go abroad, and forget myself."

He stood with a hand outstretched; pale, and with subdued anger. Margaret put aside his arm, and laid her own hands on his shoulders, looking with streaming eyes into his face. She could not speak. Her brother's heart softened in a few moments—he folded her in his arms, bent his proud head, and wept.

"I am almost mad with misery," he said; "forgive my harshness!"

She embraced him tenderly, and said: "Listen to me, my beloved brother. I cannot leave Miss Price—she may be in her last illness. Lady Geraldine comes here to-night; she is ill too, and asks for my company and attention. Above all, Arundel fears that he is going to have another attack, and he talks of coming here."

"But, Margaret, it is not *your* business to nurse him! You ought rather to leave directly. You know what has been said already."

"I know that Mr. Morton, who has calumniated you to Lord Merle, and, I fear, has poisoned *his* marriage joy, has set afloat calumnies about me; but I trust *you* do not credit them."

"Certainly not, my dear child—I know that you and Arundel love each other like brother and sister. Don't suppose for a moment I ever fancied you were likely to fall in love with one so much above you in rank—so entirely cut off, as I know he holds himself, from woman's love. It is not what *I* think, but what slanderous tongues say, that you, a young unmarried woman, must heed."

"Must I?" And Margaret smiled sadly. "What will the slanderous tongues say if I leave Miss Price and Lady Geraldine to die?"

"Ah! Lady Geraldine? Is she——?"

"She is doomed—Dr. Wynn has told me so. It is a secret. I have promised him to go this autumn to Madeira."

"Why did you not say so before?"

"You gave me no time. Besides, I fear she will not survive the summer. This marriage will kill her!—in spite of her will. You stare! Love is blind and egotistic. You have not seen that she loves Merle as you love her sister. There!—go and think over *that*, and spare some pity for her."

"Good God, Margaret! This is dreadful!"

"It is very common, my dear brother. Lady Geraldine will not die of love, but of pulmonary disease—only a little sooner, because of this suppressed passion. She could not have married if her passion had been requited—Dr. Wynn would have prevented it."

"Margaret! I don't understand you! You speak so coolly—as if you had no feeling."

"Do I?" she said, quietly. "I am used to think of this, and I have to act; I cannot give way to the grief I feel—at least, not to-day. This is one of my busy days," she said,



trying to smile; but her lip quivered, and her cheek was white.

"You are ill, my dear sister," said James, now first forgetting himself completely, and thinking of her and what she had told him. "You cannot be busy to-day—you need repose."

"Not yet—not yet!" she said, recovering herself with an effort. "I am glad to have seen you, James. You do well to go abroad—but I cannot go. Get some one to go with you. Ask William Grey—he wants to travel."

"I will think of it. Tell me now what occupies you so much."

"I—I—I cannot talk any more. I must compose myself—some one may come. Sit down and read these letters. There!—you may read all three. I can trust you; and you will cease to ask me why I continue at Carleton Castle just now in opposition to your wish."

She put the letters into his hand, and while he read them, she set open the door of the oratory, and walked slowly to and fro in the cheerful conservatory.

Her soft, slow step was at last stayed beside the fountain, and she was absorbed in pity for James and Lady Alice, when the former stood beside her with the letters in his hand.

"Thank you, my dearest sister," he said. "I have been very selfish! I see it clearly. We are all of us unhappy—even the bride!" He paused awhile, and Margaret's full-toned voice spoke these words distinctly:—

"We have all our allotted suffering; but it comes not by chance!"

At that moment a voice called "Miss Hastings!—Miss Hastings!—Will you come to Miss Price? She is awake, and asks for you."

"I am coming," she replied. Then, turning to her brother, she said: "Of course, after what has passed between you and Frank, you will not sleep in his house?"

"No; I go to the Rectory; and as you expect Lady Geraldine and Arundel, I will not stay. I would rather not see

them, to-day at least. So, farewell, Margaret! Forgive my harsh words and my selfishness!"

They embraced, and so parted; Margaret going up the new staircase from the conservatory to the countess's rooms, on her way to Miss Price, and James across the park, to his old home—the Rectory.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### INSANITY AND CONSUMPTION.

A WEEK or so after the date of the last chapter, Margaret, Miss Price, and Lady Geraldine were together in the oak parlour. The two last lay on sofas, the former sat in the window-seat sketching. They had been silent for some time, and Margaret thought her companions were asleep. Under this impression she gave way to a fit of musing—or rather to a train of thought. The pencil stopped its busy movement, and was pressed against her lips; and her eyes were fixed on some distant object that they did not see. In this attitude she remained a long time—until the tears gathered in her eyes, and her cheek became pale from intensity of thought. Suddenly she started, for a hand touched her arm, and the face of Lady Geraldine, lovely, with the brilliancy of consumption, looked into hers.

"What are you thinking of?" she whispered (for Miss Price was asleep). "You look as if you were facing a host of troubles."

"Do I?" said Margaret, smiling faintly, as she resumed her drawing.

"You do," replied Lady Geraldine, taking a seat on the cushion beside her, and passing an arm round Margaret's waist. "This is the first quiet leisure we have had since I came; and I feel well enough to talk now. So, while good Miss Price takes her siesta, talk to me, Margaret."

"Talk? About what?" asked Margaret, sketching away vigorously.

"About that same host of troubles you were facing just now.—That deer looks like a cow, Margaret!—You are drawing badly."

"Talking will not mend troubles, lady mine! That deer *is* a cow, and I am drawing as well as ever I can."

"What odious perversity and reserve! Conceited, too, like all artists! Don't you think that sky is green enough? Go on. It will be a wonderful production! Such efforts to work when you feel idle are praiseworthy."

'Great is the glory, for the strife is hard.'

There! there don't neglect your drawing to look at me! I am better—quite lively, as you see. Now, tell me—why do we not see Mr. William Grey? He has not called since I came. Why don't he come?"

"Because he can't be in two countries at once, I suppose. He went to Germany last week."

"Oh! May one ask why you sent him to Germany?"

"I? He did not consult me."

"It is your fault, Margaret, that that excellent, large young man is wandering an exile! Confess now!"

"I really can confess nothing!" replied Margaret, turning round with a smile, and looking Lady Geraldine in the face.

"No. The fact is, my brother James was unwell. Dr. — ordered him to travel for a short time before he went to the North, and he asked William Grey to go with him. They went the day after you arrived. I had a letter from James to-day. He is busy with the manufactures in the Netherlands, and is enchanted with the pictures."

Lady Geraldine's face became grave at the sound of James Hastings' name. She said nothing, and Margaret went on with her drawing in silence.

At length Lady Geraldine spoke. "In less than a month Alice and Frank will be in England again! Will they be altered, think you?"

"Marriage always alters people," said Margaret, painting diligently. "Do you think they will come here at first? I long to see them."

"And I almost dread to see them! As you say, marriage always changes people! I do not wish to see a change in Alice. She is the one perfect thing I have seen on earth.—I had a letter from my guardian, Mr. Morton, yesterday. He is in Paris, too. He has seen them. He says Alice has created a sensation there—and that Frank seems half jealous. Is he of a jealous nature think you? He is very much in love --and perhaps——"

"Jealous! Lord Carleton jealous? He is no more jealous than Othello was before Iago poisoned his mind. But God help Frank if he listens to Mr. Morton's insinuations! —That man is viler than Iago."

"Margaret! Mr. Morton is my guardian!"

"Alas! But you are of age. You can shake off his authority."

"I would not shake it off. He is my friend."

"Once more, dear Lady Geraldine," said Margaret earnestly, "I will warn you against that man; he is bad! He hates the Raby family. He would do anything to injure them. As he could not prevent dear Frank from marrying Alice—though he tried his utmost—he will do all he can to embitter their union. If Frank listens to him, his happiness is ruined—and your poor sister! Ah! it is too sad to think of!" And Margaret pushed her drawing aside, and hid her flushed face in her hands.

"What can you mean?" asked Lady Geraldine, in a tone of indignant surprise. "Mr. Morton is Frank's uncle!—our guardian!—a man in high repute! Pardon me, Margaret, I think you let personal pique go much too far. You and he dislike each other—you, at all events, have never tried to control or conceal your dislike. But you must not be unjust. You cannot expect me or any one to believe in your accusations when you have no foundation to show for them."

Margaret saw that Lady Geraldine was still under the

influence of Mr. Morton. She was young, and determined to risk offending her by telling her the whole of what she believed to be the truth concerning that gentleman's conduct in the Raby family. She spoke gravely.

"You have given me your friendship, dear Lady Geraldine. Let me avail myself of the privilege to tell you truths you are unwilling to hear. But, first answer me a question. Do you believe that I really love this family?—more than my own?—more than myself?—that I can have no motive but sincere affection for all I do, think, or say, concerning the Rabys of Carleton?"

"I believe *that* firmly! You loved the parents—you love the children—you will love the children's children. This house has no friend like Margaret Hastings."

"Good! Now let me tell what I believe about Mr. Morton. I took a dislike to him at first sight, on account of his likeness to his maternal grandfather, the wicked Earl of Carleton. Whenever there is a great personal resemblance, there is a corresponding mental resemblance. He is not fierce, and violent, and outrageous. He has not had uncontrolled power from his youth. He has had to make a position for himself—to bow to others and to bend to them. Therefore he has been crafty instead of violent in his selfishness. He is cold and cruel, ambitious and avaricious. Do you know that he is the heir-at-law to the whole Raby property—Arundel's as well as Frank's?"

"I had not thought of it," said Lady Geraldine; "but of course he is. If Frank die without issue, Mr. Morton is the next male heir. He is Arundel's heir, too, as North Ashurst was his mother's property, and Mr. Morton is his mother's brother. But what have these remote contingencies to do with his present conduct?"

"Much. Frank may die; he may have no children. An unhappy marriage may lead to such results."

"In that case, Arundel will succeed to the earldom," said Lady Geraldine.

"But not to the property. Mr. Morton will prevent that. He

will have no difficulty in proving him insane! In which case, he will get control over the North Ashurst estate, too—and, worst of all, over poor Arundel himself!" Here Margaret's hands were clasped in agony.

Lady Geraldine seemed surprised. "This is all new to me. But I am sure you are prejudiced against Mr. Morton. He is much attached to his two nephews. He speaks of them affectionately—of Arundel with the strongest pity. You are as unjust as Alice! She hates him too!"

"Thank God for *that*!" said Margaret. "If she be on her guard against him, her marriage will not be so unhappy as I have feared it would be. Why, Mr. Morton tried to involve Frank in a duel the day before his marriage. He only succeeded in dividing him for ever from a friend, and in waking in his heart the terrible fear that Alice did not love him."

"This is far too bad to say without giving proofs," said Lady Geraldine, with a bright, hectic flush in her cheek. Margaret was too much absorbed in their conversation to notice her friend's excitement.

"I can give no proofs," she said. "But I will ask one thing—Does not Mr. Morton love you, Lady Geraldine?—seek you for his wife? Excuse me; you know I speak from no vulgar curiosity."

"I am sure of it, dear. If I were to say 'Yes'?"

"I should then venture to ask one more question.—May I?"

"It is needless. I will tell you what you want to know. I have promised to marry Mr. Morton, if I am alive, this time next year."

Margaret started, and looked curiously into the face that bent over her so gracefully. Its expression was resolute and resigned; but the exquisitely-transparent skin, the *carmine* flush on the cheek formerly so pale, the splendour of the large sunken eyes, soon changed Margaret's look of curiosity into one of ill-concealed alarm.

"What is the matter?" asked Lady Geraldine, half an-

noyed, and throwing herself back. "Are you astonished at what I tell you? You seemed to expect some such reply to your question."

Margaret recovered herself with the irrepressible thought in her mind—"Ah! you are safe! *You won't be alive this time next year.*" She steadied her hand yet a few minutes longer, and bent her eyes on the drawing, for she could not bear the look of that beautiful face, while she ventured to say,

"You have not answered the question I would ask. Tell me—Do you love Mr. Morton?"

She waited so long for an answer, that she feared Lady Geraldine was offended. "Do not be angry with me," she said softly, and fearfully raising her eyes to the face which had so strong a fascination for her. It was the face of the woman whom Arundel loved. It always roused in her strange dissonant feelings—a love which was akin to adoration—regret which was almost envy—wonder, and pity, and reverential tenderness.

"Do not be angry with me, dearest!" She looked up, and saw Lady Geraldine half suffocated by a sudden rush of blood from the lungs. She was lying back on the cushion, and seemed unable to rise and discharge the blood from her mouth. Margaret dashed away her drawing, and caught up Lady Geraldine in her strong young arms, holding her so that the blood was poured forth immediately, and the sufferer breathed again. She smiled faintly. Alas! how ghastly that smile made the now white face, with its blood-stained lips and nostrils, and its great starry eyes! Margaret could scarcely repress a shudder as she looked, and she turned as pale as the poor stricken girl herself.

"Dear Margaret!" said the latter in faint but almost cheerful tones, "don't be frightened! It is not the first time. I am better now, though very weak."

"I am afraid my talking——"

"Not at all!—We will talk more another time."

Margaret took a handkerchief and wiped the poor lips, and kissed the pale cheek.

"Take me up-stairs, dear; and send them to cleanse those horrid stains away." And she glanced at the blood which had fallen on the new carpet. "Let it be done quickly, before any one comes—it is so disgusting. I myself am a shocking sight, I know; but you are too good to give way to your feelings."

"Hush! hush!" said Margaret. "I have no feeling but sorrow, dearest. Let me carry you! I can—you are so slight. There is nothing left of you!" And she took up the fragile form of Geraldine Trevor as if it had been a child's, and carried her slowly and firmly to her chamber on the floor above.

In a few minutes afterwards two female servants were busy with soap and water, clearing away the marks of the blood, and speaking in frightened whispers.

"What a dreadful thing!"—"And she so young and beautiful!"—"I suppose she can't recover?"—"I should think not indeed when it's gone so far!"—"But, Ann, is there *no* cure for a consumption?"—"None, I've heard—leastways, when it's in a family."—"She's got it from her mother."—"So I've heard. It's awful, though, to think that all the power, and grandeur, and cleverness, and money on earth won't save her!"—"So good as she is!"—"Maybe that's why she's doomed young. She's fit to die."—"I don't know about that! I think the world would be a deal better if God *didn't* take the best first."—"Ah! well, it's a queer world!"—"Don't make so much noise with that pail—you'll wake the old lady, yonder. Lord! how she sleeps!"—"Yes, too sound by half to be healthy!"—"I say! suppose she's gone off in her sleep! The doctor said she very likely would!"—"God bless me, Ann! how shocking you talk! Go and look!"—"I daren't."

While the two maids frightened each other by looking from a distance at the quiet form of Miss Price, they turned their backs on their work near the window, and did not see a gentleman stop on the terrace outside and look in. He entered the room while they were nudging each other, each afraid to go forward and ascertain the truth.



"What is all this?" asked the gentleman, looking at the pails and blood-stained cloths.

They turned with new alarm when they saw Mr. Arundel Raby. All the female servants were very much afraid of meeting Mr. Raby. Was he not sometimes insane? Who could tell what he might do—when he might go mad? Many had left service at the castle because they were so mortally afraid of a mad person; and those who remained, always shrunk from him as if he had the plague—all but some of the elder ones, who had known him as a child. Their terror was tempered by pity. This was the case with one of these two; the other caught up her pail the moment she saw Mr. Raby, and curtsying, with a terrified look, left the room. He smiled furtively—he understood the real reason of her sudden exit—but he said kindly to the one who remained: "I do not wish to frighten you both away, Ann; finish what you were doing. There seems to have been some accident here! That is blood, if I do not mistake."

"Yes!—no!—sir. It is nothing of consequence."

"What are you doing here, Ann, with a pail, at this time of the day?" inquired the feeble voice of Miss Price, rising slowly from her sofa. "Ah!—*you* there. Bless me. Everything startles me now! How are you, my dear Arundel?" she asked affectionately, as the young man advanced eagerly, and took her hand. Ann went on removing the stains while they spoke; she was very anxious to get away without being questioned, for Miss Hastings had desired that she would not explain the matter to any one unless she was obliged.

"I am rather tired with my journey," said Arundel. "I have this moment arrived from London. You are looking better than I expected—able to get about again, I see. Where is Margaret?"

"She was sitting there just now,"—pointing to the window; "there is her drawing." Arundel picked it up, and turned pale as he looked at it. He always sickened at the sight of blood.

As soon as Miss Price saw the drops of blood on the draw-

ing, she turned to Ann, and said distinctly: "Tell me what is the matter. Has Miss Hastings fallen down and hurt herself?—Has Lady Geraldine?"

The woman nodded quickly, and said: "Miss Hastings does not wish it to be talked of—Lady Geraldine broke a blood-vessel here just now, saving your presence, sir."

"Poor thing! Where is she now?" said the old lady, making a motion to go.

"In her own room. Miss Hastings carried her there just like a baby. She won't let her move or speak, and has sent to P—— for a doctor."

"What a good creature our Margaret is!" exclaimed Miss Price. "Will you give me your arm up-stairs, and we will learn how the poor young lady is!" Arundel stepped forward.

He had been struck dumb—first, by the news that Lady Geraldine, whom he had come here to avoid, had arrived before him; second, by the intelligence that the disease with which he had hoped she was only threatened had laid so strong a hold on her. Miss Price spoke, and he replied, several times on their way to the apartment of Lady Geraldine Trevor, but he had no idea of what was said. On arriving at the door, he waited outside, while Miss Price entered. Presently Margaret came out, and found him standing, with folded arms, staring at the door as if he could see through the wood. He showed, by a look only, that he recognised her (poor Margaret!), and, pointing to the room, said: "Is she living?"

"Oh, yes," said Margaret; "and with care, will be long spared to us, I hope."

He breathed a long sigh, and bowing his head, as if unable to speak his thanks for her reply, turned from her, and walked away. She stood in the place where he had left her, looking after him until she could see his figure no longer. "And this is the meeting I looked forward to so eagerly?" she thought. "Give me strength to bear, O God!"

As she was moving back to the door of Lady Geraldine's room, she found the good François standing near. He had

approached from the other end of the gallery, and had watched the meeting between her and Arundel—the departure of the latter, and the acute pain visible in Margaret's face afterwards. He dared not show the commiseration he felt, but he thought of her aunt, and could scarcely forbear kneeling to kiss the hand she stretched out, vaguely feeling about for the handle of the door, which she seemed not to see.

"Ah, François," she said, faintly smiling, "you have come with Mr. Raby?"

"Yes, Miss Hastings." Then, after a pause, he said: "He thought it necessary to bring Maddox too."

"And you?" she asked, looking significantly at him.

"I also thought it necessary. *Il aura un accès bientôt; je le crains beaucoup.* Are there any persons *en visite* here, mademoiselle? We hoped for seclusion. Your society has always the best effect. But I saw strange servants below."

"Lady Geraldine is here—now lying ill in this room."

"And Mr. Raby knows that?—*O'est cela qui l'a frappé tout à l'heure?*" asked François, in alarm.

Margaret made an affirmative gesture, upon which François said hurriedly: "*Il ne faut pas le perdre de l'œil, donc. Il souffre beaucoup, ma chère demoiselle! Je cours après lui!*" And he ran as fast as a boy after Arundel.

Margaret stayed in the gallery a few minutes to compose herself, and then entered the sick-room with her usual calm manner, and sat down by the patient, who was sitting in bed, supported by pillows, and holding a little book in her hand.

"Ah! you have come back at last. Don't go away from me, Margaret. I want you to read to me. Here's a sweet poem by Shelley's friend, Leigh Hunt, that I lately read; I should so enjoy hearing it again!" Margaret took the book, smoothed the rich black locks that streamed down in disorder over the pillows, imposed silence on the lovely patient, and began, in a low, clear voice, "The Story of Rimini."

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Margaret Hastings was never weak or depressed when there was anything for her to do or to contend with; it was only

in the becalmed moments of life, when she had to wait instead of to act, that she broke down.

The period at which we are now arrived was the most active and the most sorrowful in the life of Margaret Hastings—although the events to be recorded were nothing very remarkable. The death of an old woman and of a consumptive young one, and the frequent fits of insanity of one who had been subject to cerebral disease from infancy, were just things to be expected in the ordinary course of nature.

Among the papers which have helped me to a knowledge of this family history, are several from Miss Price, to various persons connected with it. Among them is one, written apparently about this time, which I will transcribe. It is addressed to my father :

“CARLETON, *June*, 182—.

“MY DEAR JAMES,—It is ill news that I have to tell, my dear young friend. Margaret herself is well; but she suffers much from seeing the illness of others, and knowing that all her care can only partially alleviate, not cure, their disorders. Lady Geraldine Trevor is here,—dangerously ill with pulmonary disease. As usual in cases of this kind, those who were always with her had not noted the rapid and insidious advances of the enemy; and disinterested observers either thought it cruel to raise alarms that might be groundless, or shrunk selfishly from the painful task of warning. Indeed, Lady Geraldine's decline has been uncommonly rapid. Six months ago, the symptoms were no worse than they had been ever since I first knew her. *Now*—I myself think there is no hope.

“Dr. Wynn, who saw her, by chance, a month before her sister's marriage, wrote privately to Margaret, telling her his opinion that Lady Geraldine should not spend another winter in England, and that her friends should make arrangements for taking her to Madeira in the autumn. Margaret wrote, requesting him to conceal his opinion until the marriage was concluded, and promising that she would herself go to Madeira with Lady Geraldine, if Lord and Lady Carleton were pre-

vented from going. You were here for a short time on the wedding-day, I heard. Margaret must, therefore, have told you that Lady Geraldine was not well, and was coming here for change of air. She arrived the same night, and we both (*i.e.* Margaret and I) were struck by the change in her; but Margaret is not experienced in this treacherous disease as most old women are. I warned Margaret that night that she would not bear the voyage to Madeira. It was too late. She would not believe me, but wrote to Dr. Wynn—begging him to come down immediately. He could not leave some royal patient, but promised to come down at the end of a week with Mr. Raby, who was also going to Carleton for *repose of mind*! There, my dear James, was another cause of alarm.

"We waited. On the very day of their arrival—within ten minutes of their arrival,—Lady Geraldine ruptured a large blood-vessel, was carried to her room, and has not been allowed to speak above a whisper or to move about since. Dr. Wynn has been here nearly all the time attending on Mr. Arundel. He says there is no immediate danger for her, and that in another month or so she may be comparatively well again. Margaret attends her assiduously. They are as much attached to each other as I ever saw two girls. Geraldine shows the irritability and wilfulness peculiar to her disease; and no one but Margaret can persuade her to obey Dr. Wynn's orders when she has no mind to do so. She will scarcely allow Margaret to leave her room during the day—consequently, she gets little exercise or fresh air. This, together with Margaret's affection and anxiety for the poor sufferer, begins to make her look pale and thin.

"And, now, the worst remains to be told. Our poor, dear friend Arundel is confined to his own apartments by an attack of his old malady. It came on gradually, and Dr. Wynn looks very grave when I ask if it will soon be over. No one is allowed to see him but his own regular attendants and Margaret, whom Dr. Wynn takes with him into those rooms.

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"I have spoken to Dr. Wynn. He says that we need not

fear any permanent injury to Margaret's health from her presence during these sad fits of poor Arundel's—though he admits that they are very painful for any friend of the patient to witness. He explained to me that Arundel does not recognise Margaret any more than any other person, but that as soon as he sees her his fury ceases, and he becomes tractable. Her voice, both in speaking and singing, has a powerful effect in his depressed and melancholy moods, and he shows the greatest reluctance to let her leave the room. Dr. Wynn does not think that any other person would be likely to affect his patient so favourably as your sister. It is just one of those strange fancies of insanity which should not be thwarted, and which may be made use of to work a cure. He intimated, also, that Margaret's previous experience in such things, her knowledge and love of the patient—her firmness, gentleness, and remarkable quickness in sympathising with his half-formed wishes, made her daily (or rather nightly) presence absolutely essential to his recovery. He even went so far as to tell me, that if Margaret were to fall ill, so as to be unable to continue her help in this case, or if her friends were to interfere to take her away just now, he should be very apprehensive that the present crisis would end in permanent alienation of reason.

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"Arundel has had a very long sleep to-day, I hear, and is better this evening. I think I told you he sleeps during the day, and is awake all night. He is very much delighted with the new conservatory. It is lighted up at night for him. Dr. Wynn says he walks up and down it for hours together, talking to himself. He seems gay and happy when Margaret is there with him. I often hear the sound of the new organ in the oak parlour in the middle of the night. It has a solemn, supernatural sound, as it comes sweeping through these long galleries. And Margaret's singing, though it is too far off for me to hear it distinctly, affects me to tears. I think of those two young people when they were happy infants in their mothers' arms. And then I grow wicked enough to mourn over their lives, and think what I, in my short-sighted wis-

dom, would have ordained for each, instead of this terrible affliction. Margaret herself is animated by a far better feeling. She is a noble, unselfish, pious creature. Every one loves her here. If it were not for her, I do not believe we should be able to keep any of the younger servants. The attractions of 'a nobleman's family' are not quite strong enough to overcome the terrors of insanity. Her example, however, and her kind consideration of their ignorant fears, retains the strongest-minded among the women, and the very high wages we are compelled to give, makes the men willing to pocket their natural dread of a lunatic. They cannot believe that he is harmless.

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"On looking over what I have written, I see that you will have a right to interfere on Margaret's behalf. I myself am a trouble instead of a help to her. Indeed, no one here is of use to her, and she is indispensable to us all. I would ask you not to urge any change upon her until Frank and his wife return to England. We have not dared to spoil their honeymoon by telling them the whole truth. I cannot expect to remain in this world much longer, and I would fain see all my children before I die. You must come back soon, and bring William Grey with you, to bid a last farewell to your

"Affectionate friend,

"MARY PRICE."

The good old lady's foreboding proved true. She died within six weeks of the date of this letter.

Miss Price died in Margaret's arms. The young earl and his countess, Lady Geraldine and Mr. William Grey, were also present. Hers was a placid death; and her memory was cherished for years by them all. She was buried in Carleton church, near the monument erected to her favourite pupil, Caroline, Countess of Carleton; beneath which a marble slab bore these words: "*Sacred to the Memory of Mary Price. A true-hearted woman. The beloved friend of the above-mentioned Caroline Baby.*"

The death of Miss Price was a serious misfortune to Margaret Hastings. Her life henceforth was unsheltered by the countenance and approval of a person of her own sex and condition. While the old lady lived, she furnished Margaret with an unanswerable excuse for remaining at Carleton. Even her sister Sophia and her brother Henry acknowledged that "Margaret could not leave old Miss Price to the care of servants." After her death, however, they began to persecute their sister about her "absurd determination to put herself out of the pale of genteel society, by taking the situation of housekeeper; in a house, too, where she had been an honoured guest."

Margaret bore their disapproval, and listened to their objections, with the respect which she thought they deserved,—for were they not anxious for her welfare in this matter? But she persisted in her determination. Her want of proper self-respect and regard for her family was so much deplored and resented by them, and by their younger brother and sister, Tom and Clara (now first entering into society), that Margaret was quietly dropped by them all; and henceforth she was visited by none of her family but my father. He never saw her at Carleton Castle again for many years, but he used to meet her in London, at the house of their old acquaintances, the Greys of Langford Grange—and sometimes at the old Rectory in the village of Carleton—and once or twice they met at an inn in the town of P——. After my father's marriage, on the occasion of my own christening, my aunt paid him a visit in our house at North Ashurst. My mother was displeased by the extraordinary respect and affection he exhibited for this maiden sister of his—"who was only a housekeeper in a nobleman's family," and yet "had the ease and assurance of a duchess," as my mother thought.

She was so much occupied by events of far higher importance during the year succeeding Miss Price's death, that my aunt had little time to grieve over this family antagonism. The young earl with his bride had established themselves for the autumn at Carleton as soon as they knew Dr. Wynn's



opinion that Lady Geraldine had better remain where she was. Mr. Arundel Raby's painful disorder had passed the crisis, but he was still unable to leave his own apartments. The earl's attentive care of his brother was remarked with great admiration by every one. "Such an affectionate brother was rarely seen."—"He even deprived himself of the company of his beautiful wife (when they had not been married four months, too!) to pass whole days and nights with his afflicted brother!"—"Oh! there are few such brothers as the young Earl of Carleton."

And the countess had her trouble also—her only sister was dying of consumption. Ah! it is no wonder that beautiful young couple look very sad and solemn when they appear before the whole village at Carleton church on Sundays. "Deary, deary me!" groaned the old women. "They are not a bit happier than the rest of the world, if we are to judge from their looks."

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## CHAPTER VII.

### RECOVERY, AND A FINAL CURE.

"Such punishments I said were due  
To natures deepliest stained with sin,  
But wherefore, wherefore fall on me?—  
To be beloved is all I need,  
And whom I love, I love indeed."

COLERIDGE.

THE day had been, as October days in England often are, among the finest of the year,—bright, clear, and still, with a delicious warmth in the air, and not breeze enough to shake to the ground the red and yellow leaves which had already begun to show themselves along the dark outline of the woods in Carleton Park. The sunset was gorgeous; and the young countess stood with Margaret Hastings on the terrace outside the window of the oak parlour to watch the changing tints of the sky, and their effect on the landscape. Lady Geraldine lay in the window-seat propped up by cushions, and covered with shawls. She was not looking at the sky, but was read-

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ing intently. It was difficult to recognise in the pale, thin, hollow-cheeked woman, the lovely, energetic girl of three years ago. "Decay's effacing fingers" had wrought this change, a change that unfortunately need not be particularised in this country, where we are but too familiar with it. As she read on, eagerly devouring the type with her large, bright eyes, an observer would have known that what she read had more than ordinary interest for her. It was a volume of poetry lately published. Its author had not very long before been snatched from the world, which had always been at enmity with him, and which had not yet learnt to give him honour due.

"Beautiful, glorious Shelley!" thought Lady Geraldine, as she dropped the book in her lap. "If I had but known you! But I shall know you ere long," she added, smiling to herself. "And this other! young *Adonais*! We shall have the same spiritual home hereafter, as we have had the same fate here. Poetry, consumption, and early death. It is not sad for us, only for those we leave behind. Brothers! gladly shall I join you before the last sere leaf is swept from that tree."

A bright smile lingered about her mouth as she lifted her eyes from the book, and fixed them on an oak-tree called the Giant of Carleton, which stood a quarter of a mile off in the park. Margaret and Alice now approached her. "See!" she said—and her voice was not weak even at this late stage of the disease—"the old giant looks as if King Midas had touched him, and he were turned into burnished gold."

"It is King Phœbus who has done it," said Margaret. "At least, degenerate moderns would say so. I believe in the early gods though, and I think your friend Hyperion must have been restored to his kingdom to-day. I never saw such a magnificent sunset."

"The air is getting rather cool," said the countess. "Geraldine, you must not have the window open any longer."

They entered the room, and Margaret shut the window.

"Don't disturb me yet," said Lady Geraldine; "I am so happy and comfortable here. It is a lovely evening."

"Yes," said her sister. "But you have not been watching it, my darling! you have been reading this book." She took it from her sister's hand, which hung down feebly, as if she were exhausted. Alice sat down on a low stool near Geraldine's head. It had been her usual seat, ever since Geraldine had taken a fancy to lie near the window. She took the book and laid it on her own lap, while she searched Geraldine's face with anxiety. A faint, sad smile, which seemed born of stifled tears, overspread each face as their eyes met. Margaret retired noiselessly from the room.

"My darling," said Alice, in a low murmur, "you seem happier to-night. Has Mr. Morton's visit been satisfactory?"

"Quite. He is so unostentatious in his devotion,—so content to be misunderstood, if I do not misunderstand. It is almost a pity I cannot make him amends for all the ill that is thought and said of him. Poor Morton! Remember, Alice, in all future transactions, that he was *my friend*—would have been *my husband*."

Alice could scarcely repress a gesture of disapprobation, but she kissed her sister's cheek, and replied softly, "I will remember."

"I should have married as most women marry: from gratitude, and a certain *besoin d'être aimé*. I like him quite well enough to make him a good wife."

Alice coloured deeply, and made no reply for a moment. She seemed to be controlling some strong feeling, after which she said quietly—"It is a mistake, my dear sister. To like a man well enough to make him a good wife *is* to love him."

"But love comes after marriage, you know."

"Sometimes. And sometimes the reverse comes. I would never advise the risk. In your case, I am so assured of the result, that rather than have you marry a man whom you do not love, I can see you fade day after day, and rejoice that you are going to that world where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage."

"Why this bitter tone about marriage?—you a six months' wife, devotedly beloved and loving. Yes! surely *loving*—for

that girl's caprice cannot have withstood Frank's passionate affection." Geraldine spoke with eager, trembling anxiety, and her hands clasped Alice with strange violence.

Alice hastened to reassure her.

"No, no. It is no dream. We have always loved each other. You mistook my meaning. Do not talk of Frank and me *now*! It sounds like mockery. With Arundel in the house—and you—earthly joys are out of place. Let us talk of you, my sweet sister—of you only. Tell me all you can about yourself, that I may remember it when you leave me alone. What made you so happy just now? It was something in this book, was it not?"

"Yes." And Geraldine held out her hand eagerly for the volume. "I want to read you a few stanzas. Nay; I will not read above this tone. It suits the poem best. It is Shelley mourning for the death of Keats. I want you to see how beautiful a death like that really is. It is not so sad, my sweet one, as you fancy. Listen; and remember that, though I may not be bold enough to say it to every one, to you I have often said, '*Anch' io sono Poëtà.*' This, then, is what you must think when *your* poet dies."

"Ah, Geraldine! you do not think of all that I shall suffer when you are gone into a happier world."

"No, dear; I have tried *not* to think of it, or it would be terrible to leave you. It is hard to die when one is young and beloved, and full of hope and aspiration." And Geraldine's voice was almost plaintive.

Alice embraced her sister tenderly, as she poured forth hurried words—"Ah, forgive me. It was very selfish! but I cannot face the thought bravely enough yet. I will get courage, and bear your departure. It is only for a little while—a little while. Life is very short. It will soon pass! Thank God. Only I cannot bear the agonising doubt—*If Geraldine and I should not meet hereafter!*"

"Cast it off. Have faith, dearest. I know full well we must and shall meet again. Our souls were not made to love each other *thus*, and cease to love suddenly, as if they were

the devil's playthings. God is goodness. God is love. We are secure in Him!"

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Here Geraldine stopped suddenly. She began to cough, and Alice saw that the sharp pain in the side had seized her again.

Margaret came into the room from behind the organ, and watched the sisters for a few moments before she approached them.

"I have set your verses to the 'Harmonious Blacksmith,' dear Geraldine," she said. "Will you like to hear them now? They will not disturb your present mood, and they are just suited to the hour." Margaret thought that the melancholy foreboding in Alice's face might be dissipated by the sound of that sweet old melody, and there was another person within hearing who would be soothed by it.

"Ah! we only want the sound of music and your presence to be perfectly happy," said Geraldine. "And I will listen to my own song, if you have nothing better to wed to Handel's air. Sing away, sweet nightingale."

Margaret accompanied herself on the organ, without need of light, and sang these words:

"Slowly stealing, see the shadows ever lengthen as they fall,  
Till the melancholy midnight spreads her mantle over all.

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"Over all but that bright region low down in the western sky,  
Where the sun-god's smile hath kindled golden hopes that will not die.

"Glowing with a burnished brightness, steadfast through the gloomy  
night,

That one tract of heaven remaineth waiting for the morning light.

"Surely comes the morrow's dawning; surely comes the sun-god's  
smile;

To the darkened soul light cometh, wait we but a little while."

At the conclusion of the song, Lord Carleton and Mr. Morton were discovered to be in the room. They entered noiselessly, just as it began. They now approached the sisters, and a low conversation, suited to the invalid's fatigue and the gentle solemnity of the hour, was continued until Dr. Wynn

entered the room, and, after feeling Geraldine's pulse, ordered her to bed directly.

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Before midnight, all the household at the castle had retired to rest, except the persons who were in attendance on Mr. Arundel Raby. Belated villagers who had to cross the park by night told of the brilliant lights that were to be seen along a line of upper windows, and in the grand conservatory below. But they never approached near enough to see more. The south side of the castle was doubly safe from prying visitors. It was haunted by a ghost, and it was inhabited by a madman. In vain the reflected light fell in long lines across the terrace and the garden below. I have never heard that any man or woman was brave enough to venture thereabouts in the middle of the night, to satisfy public curiosity as to who was stirring at that time, and what was being done there.

On the night to which we refer, the moon was up, and her beams dimmed the reflexion of the lights from within the castle. They also poured through the windows, and illumined the oak parlour, which was otherwise dark. Here, by force of contrast with the sombre walls, the moonlight seemed preternaturally brilliant, bringing into high relief the carved figures there, and making the outlines of the furniture sharp and black as iron. All was still, silent, and solemn. No one seemed to have been there since the young countess and her sister left the room a few hours before. The sofa on which Geraldine lay, stood, as then, in the centre of the bay-window, —a very magnet to the moonbeams, for they gathered on it like a glory, and made all else look dark. The soft cushions still retained the impress of her form. Among them something glittered with metallic lustre. It was the gilt edge of a book—the volume of Shelley's poetry which she had left behind—taking, instead, the little Testament which her sister had so earnestly urged her to read. This couch stood out to view as clearly as if it had been in the broad daylight. Presently a sound broke the stillness;—the opening of a door—not the one behind the organ which led into the conservatory,

but the one which communicated with the rest of the house. A light was seen, and immediately afterwards Mr. Morton entered, stealthily. He put out the light as soon as he saw the brightness of the moon. His piercing eyes penetrated every dark corner; and being satisfied that he was alone, he sat down, and began to look leisurely at the apartment. Mr. Morton was not changed, except that he looked sad and not saturnine. Soon his eyes rested on Geraldine's couch, and remained fixed there. He rose and stood, as he had done that morning, with his hands on the head of the sofa, and looked down on it as if she still lay there. No; not quite so!—for when she lay there he was not so cold and lonely at heart. Her presence, though dying, was better to him than her absence. Geraldine was right; Mr. Morton, who had never loved anything since his infancy, loved her. In this love he had been living for two years. The world and its ambitions had not been forgotten or set aside. Rarely, indeed, does any passion at forty-five completely master the old empire of nature and habit within a man. As the twig is bent the tree will grow. But, as in Mr. Morton's case, a powerful counteraction for a time will make the bent tree straighter than it was before. In his genuine love of the lofty-minded girl, who had promised, if her life were spared, to become his wife, Henry Morton felt half—more than half—regenerate. Plots, schemes, and ambitious desires faded from his mind. Love, if not all in all, was lord of all within him. He had divined Geraldine's young dream of love for his nephew Merle; and he had helped her pride and sisterly affection to subdue it, without letting her see that he knew a secret she had scarcely confessed to herself. He had always been near to say the word in season; and as her guardian, he had had many ways of ingratiating himself with her. He had made himself the vehicle of her anonymous correspondence with half the literary people of Europe. He had superintended the publication of a volume of her poetry;—he admired it heartily—he, that never read other poems. In short, he had made himself indispensable to her, by great and small acts of service, and he was

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really in love ;—in love, humbly, sincerely, exclusively. He knew that he was disliked by Geraldine's friends, and that Geraldine had a habit of defending him from their attacks ; and he thanked them heartily for their dislike.

When he won her consent to be his wife, Henry Morton was happy—as true lovers only are—for one day. “When she is mine, I will grow like her,” he thought. “I can afford to despise the world and to be generous, with such a wife and such a fortune at my disposal.”

He had been blind to the ravages of her disease until he came down that day to Carleton. He was terribly shocked by the change. Her fate was sealed. In his grief—that so fair, so good, so gifted a creature was to die—he almost forgot his own pain at the loss. All day long the charm of her presence had kept up this unselfish state of mind ; but when he had retired for the night, the strong flood of misery deluged his soul. “She is going, and I shall be alone once more. I shall be as I was before—cold—and—sad—a mere man of the world—an unhappy wretch.” He could not stay in his room ; and with the romantic feeling of a boy, which he would have sneered at in another, and perhaps in himself a year afterwards, he resolved to go and pass the night in the room where he had last seen her—first known that she was dying.

As he stood in the moonlight, looking down on that couch, his face must have told somewhat of the struggle within. His lips moved once as if in prayer, and he looked up to the cloudless sky. Perhaps, he had not prayed before since he was a child. He did not sit. He would have thought it sacrilege to disturb the pillows she had used. He stood revolving many things concerning himself and his one real love ;—that love which he had determined to make mutual. He had said to himself, “I *will* not die until I have made her love me more, far more, than she ever loved that boy.” As he mused over the desolation of his hopes, he was disturbed by a sound. With the instinct of love and pride, he immediately sought to hide himself and his passion from other eyes ; and,



stepping rapidly from his post, he placed himself behind a screen, and waited to see who had come into the room;—for that some one had come in he was certain. After a minute he heard a man's step near him, and looking cautiously from his hiding-place, he saw the dreaded lunatic, Arundel Raby.

I have said before that Mr. Morton was a coward; and the agony of cowardice seized him now. His love was forgotten—he only remembered that he was in a room alone with a madman in the middle of the night—and that he must remain as still as moonlight, and make no effort to escape, lest the madman should be aware of his presence and attack him.

Hearing no further sound, he ventured to look out timidly again. Yes; there could be no mistake about that tall, graceful figure. It was his nephew; but changed by his disease as much as Geraldine by hers. The fine features had become sharp and emaciated; their expression, though intelligent, was wild, eager, and passionate; the eyes burned like globes of fire, and the dry, pale lips were tremulous. He had thrown himself on Geraldine's sofa, which Morton scarcely dared to touch. He had taken up the volume of Shelley's poetry, and was looking into it by the aid of the strong moonlight. He murmured a verse now and then, and after a few minutes flung the book on the floor impatiently. It was a present from Morton.

Arundel began to talk aloud. "Why is she not here? She promised that she would come to me to-night. The moon has come again, but not my Geraldine. My own beloved!—my wife!—my Geraldine. Come. Come to me, or I shall be tormented as I have been. Ah! what sound was that? Is it you, Geraldine? Come forth into the moonlight." He had started up, and was about to rush to the screen behind which he had heard a noise, when the door of the oratory was opened, and the figure of a lady stepped softly into the moonlight. A voice that was so subdued by emotion as to be irreognisable, said: "Are you here, Arundel?"

At these words he sprang towards her. She held out her two hands to clasp his, and keep off his embrace.

"Geraldine! my own! my wife. Why have you kept away from me? Ah! you do not love as I do. You can bear to be away. And I—I am lifeless,—I feel,—I know nothing when you are not here—but that I am dark, and full of pain."

He lead her to the sofa, and placed her beside him.

"Is it not cheerful here? The moonlight plays such fantastic tricks with the carving. I see the faces change every moment. Now let me see yours, which never changes; but remains for ever the crown and masterpiece of God's creation. Do not look down, my own Geraldine."

Margaret Hastings slowly raised her head, and fixed her eyes on those of her patient, without speaking. He clasped her hands in his, and gazed into her face with intense passion. They remained thus for above a minute, when, as if overcome, he closed his eyes, and fell forward on her breast, saying:

"Oh! love me, love me, sweetest! or I shall die."

"Arundel. Do you not know that I love you more than all things on earth—than all things but God?"

He started up,—radiant, elate, strong. He looked at her with such an expression of perfect ecstasy, that all trace of insanity seemed gone,—all but the one strong delusion that the woman before him was Geraldine Trevor. *That* remained. Was his delusion much greater than that of most men in love? Is not what we love in a woman something which no one else can see?

Margaret could not take her eyes away from the beautiful face which bent so eagerly over hers. Again she felt, as she had on former occasions, that her power was going,—and that unless she withdrew immediately her self-control would break down. She tried to go, but the effort was futile, and she sank back insensible.

Mr. Morton, who had watched this scene with equal curiosity and astonishment, was struck by the strange expression which came over Arundel's face when he perceived that Margaret had fainted. It was like that of a child who looks on death for the first time. He heard him whisper to himself:

"Why did she go and leave this corpse in my arms?"

Cruel Geraldine! Let me look at the face, and see who is dead. Ha! It is Maggie Hastings. Poor girl! Why should such a merry, happy creature, die? Let me look again." And he turned Margaret's pale face full to the moonlight, and looked at it fixedly for some minutes.

A new thought took possession of his mind; and gathering her still senseless form in his arms, he carried her across the room, and passing behind the organ, went through the open door into the conservatory. As soon as he was out of hearing, Mr. Morton escaped quickly, and made his way back to his own room—pondering upon all that he had heard and seen.

Arundel bore his burden to the edge of the fountain, and laying her down gently, took water in the hollow of his hand and threw it on her face. At that moment Dr. Wynn and François appeared on the staircase. They hastened down and joined their patient.

"Who is this that is ill?" asked Dr. Wynn, who generally fell in with the present fancy of his patient, and took his cue from him.

Arundel put his finger on his lips in a solemn manner. "Hush! she is not ill—she is dead. It is my mother. I told you she often comes to talk to me. She has gone away to-night and left her corpse in my arms. I am going to wash away the stains of tears from her cheeks."

Again he took water and threw it on Margaret's face. She sighed deeply, and opened her eyes. Arundel started back as a man might who had seen a dead body restored to life. He clutched François' arm.

"See, see! She moves, she is alive!" he said, watching Margaret's return to consciousness. "She is changing again—dying. Death is only change. Just now I had my wife, Geraldine, in my arms—and she responded to my love; but suddenly she changed—died—in my embrace, and left a corpse instead. It was like little Maggie Hastings, at the Rectory;—you remember her, François?"

"Yes, milor. What did you do with the dead body?"

"We were in the oak room, there. We met in the moon-

light," continued Arundel, in a low, impressive tone, still addressing François while he watched Dr. Wynn rub the palms of Margaret's hands and fan her face with a great leaf he had gathered hastily from a plant near him. "The moonlight made us happy—when suddenly I felt the air about me tainted. Some bad spirit was hovering near!—some spirit adverse to our love. She was snatched away from me, and *that* body was left in my arms. It was the body of Maggie Hastings there. I knew it by the pale gold hair, and the kind face. How stiff and cold she was. It was the icy breath of something near us that chilled her so. I tried to revive her, but my pity was not warm enough. It is only love—passionate love—that can wake the dead, François. I tried to see the spirit, that I might command it to cease its evil work;—but I could not. My spiritual power is failing me; I am becoming like other men. I remembered the sweet breath of these flowers and the cool water; and I knew that no evil influence could have power over us, here. I carried her here, and when I put her down, I saw that it was not Maggie, but my own mother." Here he paused, and kneeling down, took the hand of the poor girl, and kissed it gently. She was quite conscious, now.

"Oh, take me away!" she said faintly to Dr. Wynn. "I am too weak to be of use. I shall only do harm."

"You shall go, my dear young lady. But make an effort to speak to him," he whispered. "He has recognised François. His fixed delusion about you is changed. Thank God! He will recover soon, I trust."

Arundel was bending over the little basin of the fountain, and watching with a pleased expression the undulating reflexion of the lamps and plants. François spoke to him, and he replied. A bell was heard, and Dr. Wynn then helped Margaret to rise, and supported her on his arm, so that she could stand.

"Mr. Raby," said the physician, in a strong, clear voice, "will you give this lady your arm to that bench, and stay with her till I return? I am called away."

"With pleasure!" Arundel spoke, and turned round with the quiet dignity peculiar to him when sane. He advanced politely; but meeting Margaret's gaze fully, he paused a moment, as if striving to recall something to mind. Dr. Wynn pressed her arm to encourage her. She kept her eyes fixed on him, and smiled. Trembling, yet full of hope, she stretched out her hand, saying:

"It is I—Margaret Hastings. Don't you know me, Arundel?"

"Yes! yes!—It is Margaret!" and he sprang forward. "Why—where have you been all this long time?—I have been very ill, and have missed you." He had drawn her arm within his own, and was looking into her face with all his old brotherly affection. François turned away to hide his tears of joy; and Dr. Wynn, satisfied by this fulfilment of his expectation, hastened up the stairs in obedience to the unusual summons of that bell, which told that his presence was required elsewhere.

Arundel led Margaret tenderly to a seat, and sat beside her, "in his right mind."

"Have you any pain here, now?" asked Margaret, laying her cold hand on his forehead.

"No;—I feel very weak; but I am not in pain. I seem to have awaked from a strange dream about my mother. Did I speak of her?"

"Yes," replied Margaret; "you mistook me for your mother."

"Did I?—That is natural!—You have been as kind to me as a mother. Ah, Margaret, I am glad to be restored to you again!—It was a horrid dream!—I thought my mother's dead body lay in my arms, and that I bore her to the edge of a vast lake surrounded by dark trees. It was night, and great stars were gleaming down on the water. The waving of the boughs and the splashing of the waves brought her to life, but she spoke no loving words. She looked cold and stern. I asked her why she had come to me? 'To take from you what you love best,' she said. As she spoke, I heard a bell toll as for

one dead, and I saw my mother no more. Did you hear a bell? It sounded to me as loud as that of a cathedral!"

"Yes!" replied Margaret. "It was a bell to call Dr. Wynn. Some one in the house must be dangerously ill. Shall François go and inquire?"

"No," said Arundel. "There is no need. I know what is the matter! My mother came to fetch Lady Geraldine Trevor. She is dead! Is it not so, François? Come and give me your hand, old friend."

François took the offered hand; but he could not speak, except in broken exclamations of joy at this complete recovery of reason. He did not give a second thought to the import of that bell. Not so Margaret. She sat pale and motionless, and listening for any unwonted sounds. Arundel turned to her again.

"What is it pains you, dear Margaret? I am quite sane now. Do not look so aghast and terror-stricken."

She firmly believed that what Arundel had said was true. "It is too late! She is dead already. I am not wanted there." She could not answer him, for she was stricken to silence by this thought.

In after-years she remembered that something like a flash of pleasure crossed her mind at that moment; something which, if put into words, would have been like this: "Now she is gone, perhaps, one day he may love *me*!" She was amazed and frightened at her own feeling; she crushed it; it was not distinct enough for a thought—certainly it had not assumed the form of a hope. Yet such as it was, it *had* existed, though only for the hundredth part of a second, and she never forgot that, at such a time, it had been possible for her heart to entertain such a selfish instinct. It was a source of humiliation and self-reproach to her; it was also a source of a large and sympathetic charity, for the sad selfishness and hardness of heart which is revealed too often by the best of us in our weakest hours.

## CHAPTER VIII.

HASTINGS OF NORTH ASHURST—HOPES OF AN HEIR.

“With renunciation life begins.”

GOETHE.

THE industrious man never waits for his work. If the work that presents itself be not fitted for him, he makes himself fitted for the work. This was the case with James Hastings. By taste and early education, a life devoted to learning, science, and art would have been proper for him. But his father's unforeseen money difficulties and death prevented the completion of his education at a university, and frustrated the young man's own scheme of life. To maintain himself in the position of a gentleman he was obliged to earn money early, and he accepted a post in Mr. Harrington's bank. Here he developed considerable talent for the arrangement and conduct of large and complicated financial affairs. In short, he was a rare union: a man of original thought and of practical skill and activity—a man born to *govern*. But his mind never took a strong political turn, though at one period of his life he had ample opportunity of trying his skill in politics. The department of this world's work in which he took most interest was the social and intellectual improvement of all classes of society—though he devoted his time chiefly to the class of working men in the manufacturing and mining parts of the country, as circumstances threw him into long and intimate connexion with them.

A field of activity opened before him just at the time when he was prostrated, heart and soul, by the marriage of his dearest friend with the only woman he could ever love. When he recovered the first stunning blow to his affections and hopes, he examined the matter with philosophical calmness, and decided that the pain he had endured was inevitable; but that it was not his duty to sit down and brood over that or any other calamity. It was his business to gain strength that he might be of some use in the world, though he *had* lost all that had made this world delightful to him. He had come

to this conclusion while he was in Germany with William Grey, immediately after the marriage; and his thoughts turned instinctively to North Ashurst. He had often been there with Arundel, and entirely agreed with the aim and tendency of the changes he had effected there. With extreme interest he had watched the gradual progress of the place during the last ten years. A dirty, idle, pauper village had been converted into a clean, industrious, solvent town. Water-power and coals were abundant in the neighbourhood; the people were shrewd, quick, and persevering; everything promised well for the success of Arundel's scheme, which was no less than to establish a new system of manufactures in the place, and to accompany its growth in material wealth with social and intellectual culture. He had resolved to devote a large part of his enormous private fortune to these purposes. But—(the *but* which stood as a stumbling-block in this case was a great one)—these purposes were dependent for success on so precarious a thing as the health of Mr. Arundel Raby—unless he could find a second self, a deputy who would enter entirely into the spirit of the great undertaking.

When he felt certain that the attack chronicled in the last chapter was about to overcome him, he took decided measures; he wrote to my father, requesting his immediate return from the Continent, and his acceptance of the important charge of manager of the North Ashurst property. In this letter he explained how he had secured any person he might appoint as manager from all interference or control.

"You, my dear Hastings, are the only man I know at once able and willing to carry out my schemes. Delay, as you know, in any one of them, is fatal. To let them lie by, therefore, until I am able to resume my work there (if, indeed, I am ever again able to resume it), is not to be thought of. My brother is occupied with his own affairs; and besides, he considers what I do at North Ashurst about as insane as any acts I may commit when I am insanest. Still, he expresses this opinion only to me and our own circle, and he is willing to



support publicly, when necessary, the manager I appoint, and he knows that you are the only man I should think of. After the late unfortunate separation, you will both avoid meeting or communicating with each other; but if it be necessary for the good of North Ashurst, you, I know, will not shrink from meeting the man who has injured you in thought and word. Your legal credentials are with Messrs. —, at North Ashurst. You will see that I have been careful to prevent disastrous effects to others from my affliction. God speed you in your work in that young town. It is ten years since I first began, as a mere boy, to change things there. And the most determined theorists against reform begin now to think that it may be desirable, since it is, so far, successful.

"You will go at once to the north, for your coming here to see me would be useless. I shall not know North Ashurst from any place in the vast limbo of a disordered mind.

"If I should never again join you there, remember that I have fought life's battle as bravely as I could, and that I rely on you, whose powers are greater, to do what I am compelled to leave undone. I have now said and done all I want at this crisis. I feel like the ship's captain who took his seat on the powder-magazine when he knew that the train was fired, and that in a few minutes he would be projected into an unknown world. Thank God it is unknown, unimagined, in my case! Your dear sister is the last reality I lose, and generally the first I recover. She is more to me than I can tell. Her presence is consolation and hope to me." •

James Hastings was not long considering this proposal. He resigned his place in Mr. Harrington's bank, and departed for North Ashurst, fully resolved to devote his brains, heart, and time to the realisation of Arundel's desires, as far as the adverse nature of existing things would permit. Personal ambition, at first, had nothing whatever to do with his exertions; they were prompted by the desire to help Arundel, and by the feeling that his own life was a gift too valuable to be thrown away because he could not shape it as he wished,

but that like all God's gifts it should be turned to the best account.

From that time "Mr. Hastings of North Ashurst" became a marked man among the northern towns. Some said he was a very clever fellow, and that he was doing great good. Others said that he was as crazy as Mr. Raby himself, and that between them they were ruining the operatives. Meantime, he went on rapidly and steadily with the good work. North Ashurst rose and prospered with the suddenness of an American city. He would allow no bad houses to be built—he himself built dwellings on new plans for the operatives. He built schools, libraries, chapels. He appropriated several pieces of ground in the town for manly exercises and children's amusement. He secured similar advantages to the colliers at Mr. Raby's mine. He did, with tremendous opposition, about one-half the things which enlightened manufacturers and proprietors do in these days. Hastings of North Ashurst had to contend with the fact that he was not the owner, but only the manager. He had to contend with brutish ignorance that could see no good in knowledge—with error and idleness all but incorrigible—with stupid wonder—with suspicion, sometimes with cunning abuse of his benevolence, on the part of those he sought to benefit.

The neighbouring landowners, and the manufacturers of the towns within fifty miles, raised a mighty storm against him and his "absurd innovations," "dangerous innovations," "revolutionary innovations." My father had a busy life of it, and was in danger of having his brains blown out many times. But he persevered.

For five years Mr. Raby was unable to attend to business in person. He was deprived of reason only for a short portion of that time, and that divided by several intervals, but his body was shattered by the violence of these attacks, and it took a long time to recover anything like his ordinary state of health. All exertion of the kind he desired was strictly forbidden by his physicians. At the end of five years he became stronger than he had ever been in his life; and at the age of

thirty-three he mingled with the busy world once more as one who was, and henceforth would be, responsible.

It was a busy world, indeed, at that time. It was the summer of 1832. The Reform Bill had just passed, and loud were the acclamations and strong the hopes of the Liberals throughout the land. North Ashurst was to have a Member. Arundel Raby had been staying there, inspecting minutely all that his friend, the manager, had been doing in his absence. He had addressed the masters and the operatives, at two different meetings, on the importance of a judicious exercise of their political franchise. Meetings were convened, committees formed, candidates proposed. To the amazement of his friends, there was a large party eager to ask Mr. Raby to stand for the town. James Hastings did his utmost to silence this unfortunate proposal before it reached the ears of its object; but he was unsuccessful.

"I was riding with him up High Street, just now," said Mr. William Grey, "and a large crowd ran before us, shouting 'Raby for ever!' 'You are our member.' 'We vote for you.'"

"Ah!" said my father, with a slight shudder; "what did he do, Grey? It was very painful."

"I felt it so, I assure you; but he bore it capitally. He bowed to them, and waved his hat, and thanked them. 'I will give you my answer next week at the nomination,' he said."

A short, impressive conversation took place one day before the nomination between Mr. Raby and the manager. It ended in James Hastings consenting that Arundel should publicly propose him to the constituency as their member. Mr. William Grey, who had left a curate at Carleton four years ago, that he might work with Margaret's brother in improving the moral condition of the Ashurst operatives, accompanied Mr. Raby and James Hastings to the hustings. They were not much affected by the unfeeling cries of the opposition mob.—"Here comes the mad member!"—"Bedlam for ever."—"Are those two his keepers?"—"No. They are all mad."

"Which is Mr. Raby?"—"Don't he look wild?"—"Where's your strait-waistcoat?"

These cries were hooted down by the mob of their own side—a very much larger one—who roared "Shame! Shame!"—"Down with the villains!"—"Hastings for ever!"—"Raby and Hastings!"—"Long live Mr. Raby."—"God bless him."—"The people's friend."—"Take out the horses."

"Hurrah for Bedlam."

"Shame!"—"Stop their cowardly throats."—"Three cheers for Raby."—"Three more!"—"Now then—pull away, my hearties."—"You'll stand, won't you?"—"There won't be a score of respectable votes on the other side."—"You won't? Too much work?"—"You're an invalid?"—"God bless you."—"Long life!"—"Make way there."

"Who wants a strait-waistcoat?" And an adventurous opponent threw one of those obnoxious articles right into the carriage. It alighted on Mr. Raby's knees. The fury of his adherents would have led to dangerous consequences if he had not set them all laughing—foes as well as friends—by making an ironical bow as he rose upright in the carriage for a moment, and then diving down suddenly into the crowd, and dragging up with one hand the miserable insulter, into whose face he looked steadily before he covered it with the waistcoat and dropped them both into the crowd again, saying, "Ah! I thought I knew him! I'm glad I don't."

The easy, off-hand way in which he lifted and dropped the man, elicited shouts of applause. The British mob is always charmed by an act of personal strength—doubly charmed if it be united with drollery. The laughter caused by this little incident, painful enough to Mr. Raby's personal friends, lasted until they reached the hustings.

One day there did the business. Indeed, the attempt of the Tory party to get in a man for North Ashurst was necessarily a failure when Mr. Raby proposed a Liberal. The property and the influence were nearly all his. And as the person he proposed was my father, who had lived among the electors, and had been their great man for five years past, there is

nothing wonderful in the almost instantaneous defeat of the other side. And yet the other side said that Hastings of North Ashurst had been brought in by bribery. A hundred pounds covered the whole expense of his election. This fact was commented on by his committee. It was the cheapest election ever known in those days.

When Parliament assembled, my father repaired to London, and Mr. Raby remained a good deal at North Ashurst. Many of my readers may remember the first session of that Reformed Parliament. London was very full—animated and expectant. People in the country who were not in the habit of paying yearly visits to town, came that year. The Greys of Langford Grange and their son, Mr. William Grey, were among these unusual visitors. Miss Hastings of Carleton Castle also came to London this year.

The Countess of Carleton was in a delicate state of health, and the earl insisted on sending for Miss Hastings.

"Let the servants at Carleton look after themselves!—or send some one from town, if it be necessary. You must be properly cared for *this time*! Margaret Hastings will keep you to early hours and regular living. Send for her immediately."

The countess's beautiful face was now habitually calm and haughty; at this moment the haughtiness increased; but the calm left it as she watched her husband's figure leaving the room.

Something like a smile touched her lips, and these words came to her mind: "Tender solicitude." "You must have an heir, of course." "You shall have your way, and Margaret shall come." "At least, I shall see an affectionate face once more."

It was a fine evening soon after Easter when Margaret came to London. She had not been there for ten years, and it was almost five since she had seen the young countess. They had parted at Carleton Castle after the funeral of Lady Geraldine, when the earl took his wife away from a place so full of gloomy associations for her. Since that time Margaret had heard occasionally from her, but her letters were always brief

and confined to the necessary business between them. Margaret had long ceased to be hurt at Lady Carleton's want of cordiality. "She is no longer a girl; and among the crowd of her admirers and friends, she can have no time to remember that she once had a companion called Margaret Hastings. The time will come when we shall know and love each other again;—for I did *love* you, beautiful Alice."

When she received a short note summoning her to St. James's-square, "not as *housekeeper*, but as a friend and companion," my aunt was much pleased. Like all persons of an intellectual and affectionate nature, she grew weary of solitude—solitude without constant and absorbing occupation. She had been alone (as far as companionship was concerned) at Carleton ever since the preceding autumn, when Arundel Raby and his suite went off to North Ashurst.

The sight of the London streets as the carriage rolled through them made her glad;—they were so gay, and brilliant, and thronged with busy men and women. Margaret hungered for the sight of fresh human faces. By the time she reached St. James's Square she was in a cheerful, almost in a merry mood.

This was a little damped by the loud, imperious knock bestowed by the footman on the door of Raby House. Then, she was annoyed by the formal ceremony with which both valves of the said door were flung open by gigantic footmen in most resplendent liveries—who looked very superciliously down on her as she entered. She saw two more able-bodied men idling in the hall, one of whom lounged up to her with an inquiring look: "My lady is not at home," he said. "What name?"

"I think you will find that your mistress is at home, when you tell her that Miss Hastings has arrived," said Margaret, turning from the man, and walking towards the staircase with her usual composed and lady-like manner.

"Are you the housekeeper at Carleton?" he asked, following her with a look half afraid, half insolent.

"I am, young man," she replied, looking at him gravely.

"And I am happy to say the servants there would be ashamed if any one among them were so ill-mannered as the few I have seen here."

"Is that you, Margaret?" cried a sweet voice above on the staircase; and in an instant the countess herself came running down, followed by her brother-in-law, Mr. Raby. "I have been waiting at home for you all day. How are you?" And she kissed her affectionately—while Margaret returned the kiss, prolonging it a little, that she might gain time to face Arundel, whose presence she did not expect. Even now, though she was thirty-two years old, Margaret always felt the tremors of girlhood on first seeing him.

"Have you no word for me, Margaret?" he said, after a minute. "I also have been waiting all day to see you."

"But she saw you half a year ago. It is a cycle since I have seen her. Come upstairs. Are you hungry?"

"I never was so hungry in my life. Don't expect that I can wait till your fashionable dinner-hour."

"There! I was right for once!—I guessed that you would not like our London hours—at least, for the first day or so—and therefore I ordered a dinner for us three to be served half an hour after you came."

"That will be pleasant!" And the three old friends went upstairs together, Arundel scanning Margaret's face carefully, and she leaning on his arm. Once, as they passed the smiling statues on the landing, a memory awoke within her. Ah! how many years ago it was since the night when the late countess died, and she a young girl had first seen those statues and these marble steps!

When they were out of sight and hearing, the four servants stared at each other with strange grimaces. One of them gave a long low whistle of astonishment; another said, "Well," he was "blowed if things was not topsy-turvied now!"—a third said, "What else could be expected from such a crack-brained lot?" and the fourth remarked, that "All the Hastingses thought no small beer of themselves."

Miss Hastings did not take more than the allotted half-hour

to dress for dinner, and her little maid, a clever girl who had never left the village of Carleton before, contrived to learn the geography of this grand town-house in half that space of time, so that she was quite competent to show her mistress the way to the room where the countess and Mr. Raby were awaiting her.

The groom of the chambers threw open the door, and Margaret, in her silver-grey satin gown, rustled softly into the room. Her steps were arrested at once, for she found herself in a place familiar yet strange—the marble saloon, or vine-room of Carleton. A cold shudder ran through her veins, and her eyes sought that part of the floor where—— Ah! a large table stands over it! Quickly she looked away—to the walls, to the ceiling—anywhere to drive away the memory of that deed.

There hang the purple grapes weighing down the slender branches, and there the leaves and tendrils wave high overhead and dance in the sunlight. The happy, happy Italian days commemorated here! Days of artist-life and artist-love! Days, too, of gladsome memory amid surrounding gloom. Alphonse de Merville, you have done your work well. The poet's thought was in your mind—

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.”

The lady to whom your heart, soul, genius,—all your best years were consecrated,—she in her day felt to the uttermost the meaning of this exquisite beauty created for her. She forgot this cold and dreary climate in the soft summer warmth and perfumed airs which came through secret channels into this bowery-room—and “the light of common day” was turned to the richest hues by that gem-like window. She had loved Italy, so that it cost her a severe pang to leave it—and in Italy the sad lady had been a *happy* girl.

“*O'était à cause de cela,*” said François, when he told my aunt his father's story—“*c'était à cause de cela qu'il a consacré dix ans de sa vie à faire cette belle pièce. La pauvre dame! Elle était bien malheureuse. Mais elle trouvait de quoi se consoler dans ce chef-d'œuvre de mon père.*” He added with



a sigh, "*Peut-être aussi n'est-elle pas la seule jeune femme qui ait pleuré et cessé de pleurer sous ces magnifiques vignes.*"

Margaret Hastings recalled that last sentence of the good François now that she saw the young countess beneath those "*magnifiques vignes*," and watched her as she sat with drooping head by the window, tapping the floor with her small foot, and fitfully plucking the petals from a flower.

Arundel stood near her, reading a letter. Margaret looked at him steadily for the first time since their meeting. His figure, though slightly stooping in the shoulders, was full of strength and vigour—the hair, though streaked with grey, was still abundant—and the face, though thin, had a look of health which she had never before seen it wear. But for those great, eager, melancholy eyes—still of the old violet colour, and still bright with too much thought—she would have believed that her great work in life was over—that he would never need her care and skill any more. Suddenly he looked up, and met her deep, affectionate gaze. Margaret blushed almost as violently as in her girlhood, but she did what in girlhood she would not have had courage to do—she immediately advanced to cover her embarrassment.

Then the countess, roused from her train of thought, drew up her stately neck, and turned her head. She never rose from her seat to meet a guest, *now*;—but, somehow, the sight of Margaret recalled the days before she had assumed her panoply of pride; and the same feeling which had prompted her to watch for Margaret's arrival, and run down stairs to meet her, now prompted her to rise, and seizing Margaret's two hands, examine her face silently.

Margaret laughed at this scrutiny—especially as her face was tinged by the blush just mentioned.

"I suppose I am very much altered?" she said.

"Yes," said the countess. "Very much. You are grown handsome."

"Pray pay her a compliment for me!" said Margaret, glancing playfully at Arundel. "I never carry small change of that kind about with me. It is not current at Carleton."

"Nay," said he, "I can only present her with this mirror (taking up a small one which served as a hand-screen) to complete her resemblance to the Goddess of Truth——"

"*Madame est servie*," pronounced a voice in the distance; upon which the mirror was laid aside again, and the trio stepped quietly into an adjoining apartment. Here they sit down to the most perfect little dinner that a first-rate *chef* can send up. Margaret notices all in secret admiration and wonder—the other two are used to these things every day, and eat without any admiration,—just as Brown or Jones takes his roast mutton and sherry.

"Where does Frank dine to-day?" asked Arundel.

"At the Russells'. Your sister Sophia gives *recherché* dinners."

"Indeed!" said Margaret, ashamed to let them know how much Sophia neglected her.

"Why does Frank dine there so often? Does he hope to pervert Russell?"

"Oh dear, no!—He would not deprive your party of so useful a man. Frank goes there for the good old reason that '*l'on revient toujours à ses premières amours*.'"

Arundel looked at his sister-in-law for a moment with the shadow of a smile, and then turned his eyes to his plate again, and replied, in the language of her last words, "*Eh bien! il n'y a pas de mal à cela!*"

"On the contrary," rejoined the countess. "But never mind Frank now. Here we have an accomplished artist—a real musician with us at last! Surely we may astonish the world now without being subject to the whims and catarrhs of those odious professional people. You and Margaret are equal to any tenor and soprano of them all—and I can manage a contralto part fairly; we only want a good bass voice."

"There is Mr. Morton's," said Arundel. "You will not get a better."

"I hate the voice for the man's sake."

"Alice!—He is most considerate for you!"

"Yes!—Therefore I hate him the more for making me hate

him. Don't let us speak of him," she said, proudly. "Surely other men have bass voices."

"There is Margaret's brother James!" said Arundel, carelessly.

"He belongs to your side of the House, and would in no sense lend us his voice, I am sure," said the countess, with a smile.

"There is Frank himself, Lord P——, Mr. E——," suggested Arundel.

"Ah, you are not without resources. I will tell you what I want to do this evening. I have a dozen places to go to. You must stay and entertain Margaret."

"I shall be delighted to do so; but would not Margaret be better entertained at some of the dozen places?"

"Don't you see she is tired by her long journey?"

"I cannot say I perceive any signs of it."

"You are determined to make me appear in the detestable form of the Goddess of Truth!—Look at Margaret's gown."

"I have looked at it. It is very pretty. I remember my mother wore just such a dress."

"From the style, I should judge that it was the same gown. It is so antiquated that she cannot possibly appear in it. Nay, I am quite serious," added the countess, as Margaret and Arundel laughed heartily.

"They assured me at P—— that it was in the latest fashion," said Margaret, looking with loving regret at her condemned gown.

"Such a thing has not been worn for a year and a half. No, no. Leave low matters like your dress to me. While you and Arundel discuss the music of a concert I wish to give, I will do my duty to society. By to-morrow, Margaret, I shall have meditated sufficiently on the subject of your dress, and we will act upon the result. However, I need not go yet for an hour or two. If you will take no more wine, Arundel, we will return to the vine-room, and Margaret shall tell us all the Carleton news."

Margaret was touched by the familiar, sisterly way in which

the lovely countess criticised her dress. "This is not like the cold pride I was led to expect," she thought. "Where is *la morgue Anglaise*?"

When the three were sitting together in the vine-room once more, without any light but that of the fire, and free from the attendance of servants, their conversation glided naturally into subjects which were near to their hearts.

"The flowers are cared for on Geraldine's grave?" asked the countess, softly.

"Yes; I went there this morning before I started. The early sunlight was on the primroses and anemones, and the smell of violets, that she loved so well, was all around. I sat on my little brother Naldo's grave, which is near to Geraldine's, and with the fresh spring coming up all over the heaven and the earth, I thought of Youth and Death without pain—not quite as one thinks at other times."

"You thought that Youth is not unmixed gladness, nor Death unmixed gloom?" asked Arundel.

"Yes," replied Margaret. "And then a young throstle perched on the thorn above my head, and regardless of my presence, poured forth his torrents of joyous song."

"Carleton churchyard is the calmest, happiest place I know," said the countess. "How often do I sit in fancy there!"

"You, Alice!" said Arundel.

"Are you surprised at that? I suppose I seem to you to have no memory—to live only in the present."

"Nay—not so, my fashionable sister. But you are not a native of Carleton, as Margaret and I are; we did not know that the old churchyard had *sweet* as well as bitter memories for you, as it has for the Rabys and the Hastingses."

"Ah! it is an old truth that we know least about those with whom we live most. Margaret, you are silent. Tell me all about our people at Carleton. How do Audrey and Rosemary get on?"

"Capitally. You know I have left them in my place during my visit here."

"Yes; and Mr. Grey. He is not married?"

"No. But I have hopes that he will marry before long," said Margaret.

"Indeed. Who is the lady?" asked her two companions.

"Miss Fenton, of North Ashurst."

"Sister to your brother's wife?" asked the countess.

"Yes. I hear she is likely to make him a good wife; which is glad news for the village. He comes back to Carleton after his marriage, I suppose?" This last question was addressed to Arundel, who replied:

"No; I should think not. I do not question the fact of his marriage. You women always scent out such things very soon: but I had no idea of it. I believe Miss Fenton is a thoroughly good girl."

"Is she as pretty as Clara?" asked Margaret.

"She is like her; I do not think Mrs. James Hastings very beautiful," said Arundel.

"Certainly not," said Margaret. "But she is a very pretty little woman, and makes a good wife and mother. But I cannot, even now, understand why he married her."

Arundel smiled. "There was nothing extraordinary in the matter, as I heard it from Grey and others at North Ashurst. Clara Fenton's father was one of the few educated men in the place when James first went there. Mr. Fenton was of real, valuable assistance to him in bringing order into the chaos there; and for the first year, James was domesticated in his house."

"And naturally fell in love with the prettiest daughter," said the countess.

"Not exactly so;—the prettiest daughter naturally fell in love with him," said Arundel. "Now, when there is no prior engagement on the man's side—and if, as in this case, her father happens to die, and she has no protector—it is probable that the woman will have her own way, and marry him."

"Probable? It is certain!" pronounced the countess. "That is how nearly all men are married. They are not active in the matter, but passive. They do not marry—they

are married. And let me tell you these marriages are far more respectable than love-matches. I have no doubt Mrs. James Hastings is an honoured and beloved wife, and has a most devoted husband. Her children rise up and call her blessed."

"They live very happily together, I know, from James's letters, and from the little I saw. You know I paid them a visit during the last winter, and was elevated to the dignity of godmother to their youngest child."

"I had forgotten it," said the countess. It was a pardonable fib. She had heard all about it, and remembered it well. She remembered that the child was a boy, born when her own dead child came into the world, and that the mother had a fancy for calling it *Frank*. The highly fashionable lady did not forget some unfashionable acquaintances. "Does your sister-in-law accompany Mr. Hastings to town for the season?" asked the countess.

"The season!" said Margaret. "Clara knows nothing about 'the season.' She came to town last week with James, but it was not for the London gaieties, poor thing."

"What did she come for, then?" asked Arundel. "I did not know she was with your brother. I have been twice to his lodgings."

"She would avoid seeing visitors in any case," said Margaret; "but now more than ever. The truth is, she fears my little godson is likely to die or to be blind, and she has brought him to London for advice. I am going there to-morrow."

"Blind. Fears her baby is blind! Is it the little Frank? *Frank Baby Hastings?*"

"Yes, my godson. He was a healthy, animated child when I saw him, and I cannot think her fears are well founded. She is an over-anxious mother. The child's eyes are clear and beautiful. They are like Lord Carleton's and yours," she said, turning to Arundel; "of a deep violet colour, and very bright."

"Just the sort of eyes in which disease and weakness are most frequent. My own, for instance," he replied. "I see

better than I used ; but at this moment I am conscious of optical delusions. The flickering of the fire on the wall makes the leaves and grapes seem to move before my eyes."

"Oh ! if you come to optical delusions, I will vanish," said the countess. "There is but one step from them to the supernatural, which I will not tolerate. Good night, Margaret ! I feel all the happier for this short companionship. I must go and dress for the opera, and will not interrupt you again. You and Arundel are such old friends, that I need not apologise for giving you the opportunity of a *tête-à-tête*. Send Margaret to her room in wholesome provincial time, Arundel. This well-preserved cheek must not lose its roundness with us." So saying, she kissed Margaret's cheek lightly, and then Margaret was aware that the countess had been shedding tears in the darkness. She pressed the little white hand which had taken hers ; she half rose :

"No, no. I will not have you move. I have been thinking of the old days at Carleton, where you used to sit just as you have been sitting for the last hour, while I and poor Geraldine talked of our future lives. How different it has all been ! Good night !—good night." And she left the room slowly.

They remained silent for a few minutes, and then Arundel drew his chair closer to Margaret.

"I have a word or two to say to you, my dear friend, which I will say now, while your heart is touched by some vague pity for Alice. She will not tell you herself, I dare say ; and I have promised Frank to speak to you privately on the subject. There is no subject upon which we cannot speak openly to each other, if necessary ?"

"Very few," said Margaret, rather nervously. She thought he was going to speak of the young love that once existed between James and the countess. She was quite relieved when he told her briefly that the countess, by her reckless dissipation and disregard of her own health, had disappointed her husband's hopes of an heir last year ; that now she was in a condition to raise those hopes once more, he was deter-

mined that some check should be put upon her fashionable follies.

"You, Margaret, are a sort of natural guardian of the health and happiness of the Rabys," said Arundel, smiling; "and to you we looked immediately as an ally who would obtain the desired influence over Alice. I say *we*, because I am not without the ambition of my race; and wish to see a stout boy or two born to my brother, that there may be a Rabby to inherit Carleton, and another to inherit North Ashurst. I would like to have several nephews from whom to make choice of my heir. I would choose the one most like a Hastings—that he might take '*Excelsior*' for his motto, and not '*Stare super antiquas vias*,' which would destroy the new world which James and I have devoted our lives to create. Will you teach the lovely lady how she may best become the mother of a numerous and healthy progeny? The education of such women on physiological subjects is worse than nought. No wonder we have such a miserable race of young people."

"I will gladly do what I can," said Margaret gravely. "But she is as wilful as of old. I cannot hope to rule her."

"Through her affections. She loves you, I think."

"Surely her husband's influence——"

She stopped, for Arundel pressed her hand, and said, sadly,

"There is nothing to be hoped from *that*. They have been married nearly seven years, you know. A husband's influence seldom lasts so long. A new person—yourself, for instance—would have a better chance."

Margaret spoke quickly. "If your brother and his wife do not love each other——" She paused.

Arundel said with a smile,—“Margaret, you are a very woman!—Revolutionary in thought and feeling—supremely illogical in argument.”

"How?" asked Margaret, returning the smile.

"Thus: first, you take for granted that Frank and Alice do not love each other. I would never undertake to say that any given couple do or do not love each other. In no case



are appearances so deceitful as in the behaviour of married folks to each other. See, but do *not* judge for yourself. Then, taking for granted that theirs is a marriage without love, you denounce it as immoral, without staying to consider that you *know* nothing about marriage beyond your maiden idea that it should be an eternal union, formed by strong love, or love that the lovers verily believe to be strong. How, if it prove mere fancy, or animal desire, or gratified vanity, after marriage? How, if it were indeed *love* at the time of marriage—mutual, beautiful love—and it should change, on one side or both, into indifference—or even into aversion? How then, Margaret?”

“These are questions which I ought to be able to answer, after saying what I did so hastily just now,” she replied; “but, truly, I cannot; I never like to consider them.”

“No. Like most pure-minded women you think of marriage as you imagine it, and as once in a lifetime you believe you have seen it. You shut your eyes to the great, broad fact legible everywhere in society—that it changes its nature with the changing nature of its votaries.”

“Is there then nothing enduring?”

“Yes, Margaret—true Love, true Faith, wise Hope. Now, as ever, ‘abideth Faith, Hope, Love—but the greatest of these is Love.’ Marriage may or may not be of love.”

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## CHAPTER IX.

BABY FRANK—LADY CARLETON’S STRANGE VISIT.

“Si Titus est jaloux, Titus est amoureux.”

*Bérénice.*

LONG before the hour when the countess rose on the following morning, Margaret left the house with Mr. Raby. The porter watched them, with amazement, walking arm-in-arm across the square towards Pall-Mall. He remarked to his fellow-idlers afterwards that he “should give the governor a hint.”

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He had "once't saved a noble *fam'ly* from a *sim'lar misfortun*; when Lady Maria Pevensey carried things very far with one of the grooms. They was just going to elope together when he tipped the wink to old Lord Bulverhithe."

"And he's tipped you handsomely, every year since, to hold your tongue," observed one of his listeners.

"Which I have done, true and honourable."

"Oh, of course!" sneered another. "And whose game are you going to spoil now?"

"Why, that Carleton housekeeper's."

"I'd like to put a spoke in her wheel, myself. I never in all my life saw such a regular stuck-up piece of goods. What's she up to?"

"Up to!—Ah! you ain't old enough to know half the game of them women. If I don't keep a sharp look-out she'll make that poor Mr. Raby marry her."

"Oh, come, come! He can take care of himself. He knows what's what."

"Can he. That's all you know about it. Here, give me my hat, and sit here till I come back. I should just like to see where they go to."

So saying, this faithful porter ran as fast as his legs would carry him after the suspected pair. They stopped at a superior lodging-house in Spring Gardens. While they were waiting at the door, Mr. Raby caught sight of his brother's huge porter. He beckoned him forward, but the fellow affected not to see, and turned away hastily.

On inquiry, Mr. and Mrs. James Hastings were found to be at home. By previous arrangement, Margaret went into the house alone, and Arundel was to fetch her in time for a drive with his sister-in-law in the afternoon.

It is needless to trouble the reader with the anxieties of my parents, on my account, at that early period of my existence. My mother was really alarmed, and had brought me to London that she might hear the opinions of one or two eminent physicians on my state of health. My aunt spent great part of that day in trying to convince my mother that I was really

a healthy child, a fact of which she entertained no doubt half an hour after I had been trusted to her arms. The reader, young or old, can well imagine with what disregard the opinion of my aunt, an old maid, was treated by my mother, a married woman, with three children. My father, on the contrary, considered his sister's opinion final—first, because it agreed with his own; and next, because "Margaret was the most sensible woman he knew." I am not sure that this last assertion of his was not at the root of my mother's coldness towards my aunt—this, and the lightness with which the latter treated the very grave complaints I was said to suffer from. The physicians consulted, one and all declared on my aunt's side.

"The child was teething."—"It was too much wrapped up."—"Overfed."—"Not enough in the air."—"There was nothing the matter with the eyes!"—"Was it in a dangerous state?"—"Certainly—in danger from its present treatment. Alter *that*, and the child will be a fine fellow;—grow up to be as tall and as strong as its father."

My mother was scarcely convinced; but thought that these grand London physicians made light of the case, and did not trouble themselves to inquire into it. She had "more faith in old Mr. Bygone, of North Ashurst. He entered into the case properly." So I was taken back to North Ashurst again, and there my dear mother put me once more under the care of that children's enemy, old Mr. Bygone. If I had not been a very strong child, I should have fallen a victim to his careful ignorance; as it was, I passed for a very delicate child, until I paid my first visit to my dear aunt, at Carleton.

I may as well relate a little anecdote which belongs to this period of my narrative. Before my mother left London, she was one night awaiting my father's return from the House of Commons. She would never go to bed on these occasions, and was only too happy to greet him when he *did* come home, to feel much fatigue in sitting up. On this particular night her spirits were very much depressed. She had, in the course of the day, received visits from her husband's brother Henry,

and his sister Sophia; and they had warned her against James's lavish generosity, and his want of skill in making a fortune himself, "whatever he may do for others." "He was very clever, very industrious, perfectly successful, but his cleverness, industry, and success were all Arundel Raby's property—not his own;—he was only an *employé*!"

"Why could he not continue to act as Mr. Raby's manager, and conduct some private business of his own?—a factory or a bank? With his connexion and interest he might soon make a fortune!"—But "I know him, Clara," said Henry. "He will let every good chance for himself and his family slip through his fingers, and will end life as he is now—a respectable servant of the House of Raby."

"Just like Margaret!" said Sophia, tossing her head.

"But James is a Member of Parliament—as good as any Raby!" remonstrated his admiring wife. "He may not be clever at making a great fortune, but there is no man more respected than my husband in our part of the country, I assure you!"

"But the respect of your part of the country won't maintain you and his family, in case anything should happen to him," said Henry Hastings, roughly.

The tears came into my mother's eyes. "In that case I should not long want maintaining; and our children would surely never want while you two live?" she said, sadly.

"As far as our means go—certainly not!" replied Sophia. "Come! you must not take things so seriously. Only, if you have an opportunity, remember to make James look after his own interests. Suppose you have a dozen children, do you suppose they can all be educated and established in the world on your present income?"

"Just think over that, my good little Clara; I am sure you would be very sorry to have your children a burden on their relations. Remind James sometimes of the duties he owes to his wife and children. He will not forget those he owes to society."

They left the young wife troubled, and sick at heart. She

had never dreamed of any faults in her husband; but what they had said roused a suspicion that he might have this special fault. Timid and over-anxious—she sat that evening alone, calling up visions of imaginary future troubles for her children,—poverty,—sickness,—loss of station,—perhaps even starvation. She flung herself in agony by the side of her baby's cradle, and kissed the little creature with pale trembling lips. The child smiled sweetly in its sleep, as if to reassure her, and she rose up comforted by the sight of her darling. At that moment she heard a slight knock on the door which led into her sitting-room. She opened it, and found a female servant of the house standing there, looking wild with astonishment.

"If you please, ma'am—there's a lady wants to see you!"

"A lady at this time of night!—twelve o'clock!"

"Oh, yes, ma'am!—She's too grand to be kept waiting—and—oh, Lord! here she is, ma'am!" And the alarmed servant backed out of the presence of the new comer as if she had been a queen.

My mother was a well-bred gentlewoman, but she could not refrain from uttering a slight cry, or from staring with astonishment at the intruder.

She was a lady—young, and very, very beautiful;—in an elegant ball dress of pale blue satin—with a tiara and stomacher of diamonds. A mantle of crimson velvet slipped from her shoulders and fell to the ground unregarded, as she stood in the centre of the room, her eyes fixed on my mother, with an expression of mingled pride and curiosity. My mother did not quite like the expression, and gained courage to say that she "feared there was some mistake."

The lady seemed to recollect herself, and removing her fixed gaze from my mother's face, said—"Excuse me, Mrs. Hastings. It is no mistake. I am Lady Carleton. I wished very much to see you and your little boy. Owing to the breach of friendship between the earl and Mr. Hastings, I am forbidden to visit you." And her proud lip curled slightly. "I regret it."

My mother bowed gently, and advanced a chair for this strange guest, saying—"I am sorry too, since—" She hesitated, and finished her sentence by a look of admiration at her visitor's face.

"You know, of course, the whole quarrel between our husbands?" asked Lady Carleton, hurriedly.

"Nay," replied my mother; "I did not know they had ever been friends. James has never spoken to me of Lord Carleton."

"It is best so," said the countess. "Best for you not to speak of the past to him. He and my husband were strongly attached to each other in early life—perhaps, are so still—but they quarrelled, and cannot be re-united."

"I shall carefully avoid speaking on any subject that would be painful to him," said my mother, quietly.

The countess looked at her curiously for a moment; but her countenance did not change, and her visitor then said:

"You are a happy mother, I hear, Mrs. Hastings. I fear that lot will never be mine. Margaret has told me of your anxiety, groundless as she thinks it, about your infant. We have talked of him and you till I felt an irresistible inclination to see you both. Baby Frank has haunted my dreams these three nights, and as I was driving home just now, I acted upon a sudden impulse to come here and bribe the nurse to let me see him. I knew that Mr. Hastings is still in the House, and that nurse Sarah does not go to bed until after his return. (You see, Margaret has initiated me into the habits of your family.) The stupid woman who brought me up here has spoiled all. I am sorry to have disturbed you, and now am obliged to reveal my secret design. Will you forgive me, and let me see your sweet boy?" And the power of her smile vanquished my mother's sense of something very unconventional in her visit.

She led the way to a chamber adjoining, and placed the night-lamp over the cradle. Lady Carleton stood for a moment gazing on the placid face of the infant, and then knelt down and kissed it. When she rose again tears were in her

eyes. She looked intently at the child, and forgot everything else. She did not observe that Mrs. Hastings had left the room, until after satisfying her gaze she kissed the child once more and found herself alone. She stepped back to the door of the sitting-room, but paused before entering, for she saw that James Hastings had returned. He was standing with an arm round his wife, kissing her tenderly, and apparently reproaching her for sitting up. His wife said something in a low tone; James Hastings drew himself up, and faced the door of the chamber with an eager look. The countess passed through it and stood before him, radiant as a fairy vision. She was calm now, and smiled softly, like the Lady Alice of old times, as she bent her head to him, and said :

"Mrs. Hastings will, I hope, plead an excuse—the excuse of a woman's—a mother's fancy, for this unseasonable visit. You will also, I trust, explain to her that it would give me great pleasure to be ranked among her acquaintances; but that in this matter I am not my own mistress. And now let me say good evening! Your little boy is, indeed, a sweet child, Mrs. Hastings; I have skill in augury, and I foretell health and prosperity for him. Good night!" And she glided from the room, leaving it dark to the eyes of both husband and wife. James Hastings stood as if stupefied, and made no effort to follow her, until his wife touched him gently, and threw a velvet mantle over his arm, saying, "It is hers. You let her go down alone. There may be no one to open the door."

Her husband obeyed her, and followed the countess. She had reached the hall, and was trying to open the huge lock with her two white hands. James rushed forward.

"Ah!" she said, "I was afraid I could not manage it. What a queer old lock!—My cloak! Thank you! The carriage is here, I know." He handed her in without saying more than "Good night. This visit shall not be spoken of. Thank you for your kind interest in my wife and child. Good night!"

The carriage rolled off. James stood on the steps and

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"You have told a lie," he said, in a low tone. "You have attempted to deceive me. You have been somewhere since you left the Fortescues."

"I have, my lord. You will excuse me if I do not converse with you any more now. I am too tired now to vindicate myself by words—the only way which a woman can—from your gross accusation. To-morrow, painful as it will be to prove to any one that I did not tell a lie, I will endeavour to convince you. Good night, my lord." So saying, she walked with dignity across the room and rang the bell. Never was her beauty so dazzling as at that moment. Her husband felt his fury and his scorn melting away as he gazed;—he advanced a step or two—he spoke in an altered tone—"Alice!"—he tried to take her hand. She withdrew it quickly. "Alice."

"My lord, I wish to be alone."

"Alice. I spoke hastily—forgive."

"My lord, I do not find it easy to forgive an insult. By the morning I may be able to treat it with the contempt it deserves. Once more, good night." She must have reckoned unconsciously on his love for her—for she expected to see him obey her. And perhaps because she felt no misgiving as to her power, and bated not one jot of her dignity, he did obey her, and left the room as her maid entered it.

"Justine," said Lady Carleton, "go and see if Miss Hastings has gone to bed. If she be still up—ask her if she will oblige me by coming here for ten minutes."

Justine retired, and Lady Carleton sat down before the fire, and looked steadfastly into it, with her white hands clasped in her lap. The thought in her mind was like this:—"How different is the lot of Mrs. James Hastings, with such a husband and such a sweet child!" It was a dangerous theme for her—more dangerous than anger against her husband. She tried to return to *that*, and found it all gone. "What is the use of disturbing myself? It is just one of the barbarisms—one of the vulgar familiarities—of marriage. To no other woman could he have said '*you lie*.' I must be prepared

for these things! He has got used to me, and is as much without restraint as if I were a servant. O marriage!—you may be the end, you can never be the beginning, of love.

"Is that you, Margaret? Come in, my dear. Justine, I will ring when I am ready. Sit down, dear, close to me. What are you looking at?"

"At you—your wonderful loveliness. I never saw you in so becoming a dress. Your head looks like a star—those diamonds and your eyes glitter with quite heavenly brilliancy. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Only getting into a passion."

"*Cela rafraichit le sang!* With whom?"

"With my Lord Carleton."

Margaret looked grave for a moment, and then smiled.

"What do you smile at?"

"At a pleasant thought. People never get into a passion with those about whom they are indifferent."

The countess smiled too, and then said—"Margaret, on my way from the Fortescues' just now, I stopped at the house where Mr. and Mrs. James Hastings lodge. I asked for nurse Sarah—intending to bribe her to show me baby Frank. Some one asked me to alight. (Don't interrupt me—I know it was foolish!) I did so, and was shown to your sister-in-law. It was very awkward, and I had to explain to her who I was and what I came for. She was pleased to show her infant; but evidently amazed at my want of etiquette. I dare say she thought me very ill-bred."

"That is not surprising, under the circumstances," said Margaret. "Did you see any one else?"

"Your brother came home before I got out of the house. I merely saw him. He put me into the carriage; and as soon as I reached home Frank came here. I thought he would be charmed at my improved hours—(home before one!). I told him I had *only been to two* parties; that I had come from Lady Fortescue's; when he looked at me in a most outrageous manner, and said I had *told a lie*—that I had been *somewhere else* since I left Lady Fortescue's. Of course he had been

playing the spy. I was disgusted, and sent him away without any explanation."

"You did? That was wrong!" said Margaret, warmly. "Lord Carleton is incapable of playing the spy deliberately. He must have seen your carriage standing at a house unknown to him, and very properly waited to see whether the servants were using it with or without your knowledge. Servants have very imperfect notions of right and wrong."

"Cunning Mrs. Housekeeper!"

"Then, if he saw James conduct you to the carriage from the said unknown house, don't you think that if he have any love for you he would be gloomy and suspicious when you did not say at once what freak you had been performing, but merely said you had come from Lady Fortescue's? You should be careful not only to avoid evil, but to avoid all appearance of evil?"

"Then you think my Lord Carleton was justified in telling me that I lied?" said Lady Carleton, haughtily.

"Not exactly," said Margaret, gently laying her hand on the white arm nearest her. "He should have been patient. He must ask pardon for *that*—even though the letter of the truth is on his side. He is generous. He will acknowledge an error to you."

"He has asked pardon—and I was too angry to behave well. I sent him off till to-morrow; and to-morrow he will not return to the subject." The fair Alice's eyes filled with tears. "I would not mind so much if this misunderstanding were not connected with the old fatal subject. Margaret, I feel afraid! Suppose he should go and ask an explanation of your brother—how ridiculous he would make himself and me! Think of the gentle laughs at our expense of James Hastings and his pretty wife. Oh, it sets my heart on fire!" And the countess sat down and wept.

Margaret pondered for a moment, and then said, "Trust to me. Write one word to your husband. Here is a pencil and paper. Say 'I was wrong. Come back to me.'"

The countess hesitated, but after a little while did as Mar-

garet advised. And the latter disappeared. She took the note herself to Lord Carleton's study.

He stood moodily before the fire, alone. She gave the note, and said, "Do not let your just indignation have way. Go, my lord."

He read what was written; a flush came over his face, he pressed Margaret's hand, and said, "Thank you. Say I will go presently."

She turned again as she was opening the door, and saw the emotion he tried to check. She seemed not to see, but said what she intended. "If you can persuade Lady Carleton to give up this London season before she is worn out by it, and go to Carleton, all will be well. It is the only plan I can devise. She will hear you."

He shook his head.

"Try, my lord. The explanation she will give you now, will prove indirectly her strong desire to be a mother. Work upon *that*, and all the little clouds of your married life will pass away. Come down and live for a year at Carleton. Both of you. Sad memories will fade before the quiet present. A golden time may be yours."

Lord Carleton took her hand, and tears stood in his eyes as he said, "May God reward you, for neither Arundel nor I can. I will go to Alice."

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE LOVE OF MIDDLE LIFE—RENUNCIATION.

"S'il y a un amour pur et exempt du mélange de nos autres passions, c'est celui qui est caché au fond du cœur et que nous ignorons nous-mêmes."

LA ROCHEFOUCAULT.

AMONG the important events that spring from trivial causes, may be numbered the beginning of domestic happiness for Lord and Lady Carleton, which sprang from the irregular visit the latter paid to my mother, or rather to myself. Mutual explanations brought about mutual accusations and forgive-

ness, and led the way to open expressions of regret for the past, and of sincere wishes for the future. The earl had always loved her—he was not too proud to aver this, and to ask permission, married though they were, to try to win her love once more. The refined gallantry and the enduring affection united, were more than sufficient to fix the unattached heart of a woman who had long outgrown her girlish love—a woman, be it said, who had always had a sort of half love for the most charming young man in London, though he *was* her husband, and had taken it into his head to be jealous on their wedding-day.

Within a week, everything was conceded to her husband. She would take care of her health—now, that she was convinced his anxiety was as much on her account as on that of the wished-for son. She “would go to Carleton, and live like an obedient animal, or flourishing vegetable.”—“Yes; she knew that Margaret Hastings was at the bottom of this.”—But before “they went away from London she was determined to show Margaret the highest society there.”—“It is all settled, my dear Frank. I mean to present her at the next Drawing Room, and to give some *soirées* in her honour.”—“If she *is* unused to society, so much the worse for society! I don’t think it will dazzle her.”—“Our housekeeper. What of that? Is she not by birth and education a gentlewoman? Mrs. Russell’s sister? Your mother’s godchild? Arundel says, if your mother had lived, Miss Hastings would have been brought up as your sister. And is she not more than a sister to poor Arundel? We ought to be proud to do her honour.”

“You are my generous, noble-hearted wife! Do as you will, and I will second all your efforts in her favour.”

Thus spoke the husband, not giving utterance to other thoughts her words had suggested. When he was again alone they recurred to him. “More than a sister to Arundel!” “I cannot make out the relation between them. Love on her side there *must* be. No woman could do what she has done for him from feelings of friendship or lofty charity! Yet he has given her no return. Sane or insane, he has loved no one

but poor Geraldine. And will love no other through life, if we are to judge by the tenacity of feeling exhibited by such men as my afflicted brother. Yet she has immense influence over him. Her friendship, her good opinion, her advice, are *now* of more importance to him than *mine*!"

It had come to this—the generous, affectionate Viscount Merle of former days was jealous, as he had been then, of his brother's love for Maggie Hastings. Jealousy is an ugly name for one of the commonest feelings. The jealous call it *wounded affection*.

"If," he continued—"if, as Morton says, there is something between them, she must desire a marriage, and must be working towards that end. This is why she has put it into Alice's head to introduce her into our society. She wishes that I and Arundel should pay her respect publicly. But marriage! it is impossible. Arundel has resolved never to marry. '*There shall be no more mad Rabys!*' he has said. He will never marry. But when his brain gives way again, as it may, will she not persuade him to do what she wishes? But I and Morton could upset *such* a marriage instantly!—and she knows that. I cannot understand her. Morton is right: 'Women who set up for more simplicity and self-denial than others, are profoundly artful and profoundly selfish.' I must watch you, Miss Hastings. Good friend as you have ever been to the Rabys, I *must* know the reason why you have given up all usual feminine pursuits and ambitions. *Why* are you apparently careless of station, of admiration? *Why* give up your own family—even offend them—to act the doctor's assistant to my brother, to play the part of *ménagère* at Carleton, and humble companion—even monthly nurse—to my lady?"

It was in this mood of mind that Lord Carleton received and read an anonymous letter, warning him against "the treacherous designs of that viper the countess cherished in her bosom"—"that ambitious female, the housekeeper from Carleton"—"she was using all her insidious arts to entrap Mr. A—— R—— into a marriage."—"If your lordship needs

proof beyond what you see in your own house, you have only to follow Miss H—— any morning when she goes for her early ride."

Lord Carleton flung the note into the fire. It was a vulgar, ill-natured attempt to traduce Miss Hastings. His pride was hurt that any one should dare to address him thus. But the letter produced its effect. It could not be forgotten. Three days afterwards, Lord Carleton rose earlier than usual, and from the window of his dressing-room watched Margaret Hastings mount the countess's horse, and, followed by the countess's groom, ride slowly up into Piccadilly. Five minutes afterwards he himself was riding along that deserted, sleepy street, towards Hyde Park, keeping in sight the object of his pursuit. To his surprise she did not go into the park, but remained in the road, and turned down to Brompton. He had so many friends thereabouts—so many other associations with that rural suburb—that Sunny Bank did not immediately occur to him as the probable place of her destination. Not, indeed, until she stopped at the gate did he remember the interest that place must have for her. And then he felt ashamed of having followed her. "The house is Arundel's certainly; but he is seldom there! Of course this mischief-maker does not know that she lived here with her aunt in girlhood. Malice is always blind and ignorant! A pretty fool I have made of myself." With this reflection he was about to turn back, but at that moment he saw that the groom who held Margaret's horse had seen him. There was no alternative. He could not allow a servant to suppose that he had been secretly following Miss Hastings. He rode up to the gate, alighted, and threw the reins to the groom, saying, "I shall return with Miss Hastings."

He entered that quiet old garden, redolent of spring perfumes, and bosky with fresh-budding shrubs. He saw Margaret walking slowly in the distance—now lost to sight, now emerging from the thickets. She seemed busily occupied with the spring flowers, which grew luxuriantly here. She had a basket in her hand, which she filled with them. Often

she stopped to look around, and stood as if meditating on the past. Presently she retired within the old jessamine bower which her aunt had loved. After some hesitation, Lord Carleton followed her. She was in tears. When he came in she tried to smile.

"You here? It is nothing!—only the old memories! You remember my noble aunt? She made my life happy; and from her, in this place, I learnt how I might be useful in my generation. I am glad to have seen it! Arundel, with true taste and feeling, has altered nothing here. When you superannuate me at Carleton, I am to end my days in this place," she said, with a smile. "But what grieves you, my lord?—You look ill."

"Nay, Margaret Hastings. If I grieve, it is only over the weakness and changes of my own nature. To come to this place in the quiet morning is a medicine for diseased minds."

"It is good for all minds. I have been here every morning for the last fortnight. Your brother takes my advice, and sleeps here now; and I, who love all my country habits, ride out here before you fashionable folks are awake, and carry him off for a canter on Putney-Heath. Here he comes at last." And she pointed to Arundel, who came out hastily from the house, whip in hand.

"Your brother has come to ride with us," said Margaret. There was something in her tone which made the conscious Lord Carleton feel sure that she guessed why he had come. He rode with them that morning, and began to see that Margaret Hastings was, indeed, as his uncle Morton said, "a dangerous woman to be intimate with." Besides, she was the best horsewoman in London—one of the best talkers, though she talked moderately as to quantity. Her face became almost beautiful in intimate conversation, such as they had during that morning ride. She was fresh and original—direct, brave, and full of graceful humour. Her laugh was infectious: and the two brothers, with careful minds, busied about many things, felt their burdens removed while they rode along the Fulham lanes with Margaret Hastings on that fresh spring morning.



"We have brought you back to durance vile, Miss Hastings," said Lord Carleton, as they alighted at Raby House. "You are to be presented to-day, and to go to the Opera, and I know not where else. You won't look quite so much at ease as you do now."

"Oh, I shall enjoy those things, once in a way, very much!—the Opera especially. But I must go and see the milliners, who are waiting for me, poor things! *Au revoir.*"

"Oh, *we* shall be in attendance upon all your other public performances to-day," said Arundel. "Mind, you are to look and do your best, or poor Alice will be disappointed!" he whispered.

"Jones," said Lord Carleton to the porter, as soon as the hall was clear, "some low, designing person has sent me an anonymous letter." He took it from his pocket, and held it before the alarmed Jones's face. "Look at the address well. Do not take in any more letters in that handwriting, or I may no longer need your services." Then, tearing the letter into fragments, he scattered them over the marble pavement, and returning to his horse, rode off, without looking at the discomfited Jones.

A few weeks afterwards, the Countess of Carleton had succeeded in her desire. Margaret had made a sensation. Everybody was curious about her, because she was something quite new; and many persons felt or understood the real superiority of her nature, and were anxious to see more of her. She was talked about.

"Have you seen her?"—"No; what is she like?"—"Like no one I ever saw."—"A beauty?"—"Oh dear no!"—"Still her style is very effective."

"Was, you mean; she is five-and-thirty if she is a day old."—"That is nothing. There are women who are still young at five-and-thirty."

"But who is she? A relation of the Raby family?"—"Yes."—"No—I assure you. She is sister to Mrs. Russell."

"What! sister of Hastings, the Member for North Ashurst?"

"Yes; and she is like him in person."

"I should like to see her."

"Well—come to my box at the Opera to-night—it is opposite Lady Carleton's. She is sure to be there. She is very fond of music, and never misses one of Pasta's nights."

"That is the sign of a virtuous character! I will do myself the honour."

At the Opera Miss Hastings appears with Lady Carleton, her husband, and his brother. She is dressed with all the taste and skill required at two-and-thirty, and looks so beautiful that the Carleton villagers would not know her. Mr. William Grey gazes up at her in mute admiration from his stall in the pit. She recognises him, and he blushes up to the roots of his hair as he bows in return.

The entrance of Lady Carleton's party is the signal for conversation in the opposite boxes. Lady Carleton is satisfied, and talks to Margaret.

"There is your sister, Mrs. Russell, with Mrs. Harrington. See! she is trying to catch your eye."

Sophia and Mrs. Harrington exchanged smiles with Margaret.

"How very well Mrs. Russell wears," said Lady Carleton, with a coquettish look at her husband. "She does not look more than ten years older than Margaret."

"She is not five years older," said Arundel, laughing. "One would think Margaret was your daughter, you are so bent on making her appear young. She really looks almost like a girl to-night. You do, indeed, Margaret!"

"I am sorry for it. Years ought to bring the philosophic face as well as the philosophic mind. Every woman must be defective who does not look her age. I pride myself on looking and being thirty-two."

"Then don't listen to Mozart; especially with that poetic head-dress."

"I can't to-night—we are to have '*La Somnambula*' instead of '*Don Giovanni*.' I have not yet heard Rubini in Elvino."

She then took a survey of the house, smiling with pleasure

that her head-dress had been admired. She was surprised to find that she had met great part of the company present at various houses during her short season of fashionable gaiety. Then the overture began, and she listened attentively, and spoke occasionally to Arundel in a low tone. In the meantime, her companions, especially the countess, saw that all their acquaintances were busily talking about Margaret. Mr. Morton and some other gentlemen came into their box between the acts. Lord Carleton and Mr. Raby left it. From that time Margaret was less occupied with the stage. Her eyes wandered vaguely, in appearance—carefully, in reality, into every box she could command. After a time, she seemed to have found the object of her search; her countenance cleared, and she listened once more to the music. Many eyes were upon her, but only those of William Grey noticed this change. He saw the person she had been looking for. He knew before he saw that it was Mr. Raby. That gentleman went from box to box, paying his respects to the fair occupants, and gathering their remarks upon Margaret. She, on her side, was delighted to see the flutters which his arrival produced in every coterie. She thought the flutters were all of pleasure. She did not know that there was well-concealed fear in some. How glad we are to see those we love in secret admired and applauded by the world! It was for *this*—to see Arundel moving about in his own sphere, and to hear what was thought of him there, that Margaret consented to Lady Carleton's caprice of introducing her to the world of fashion. She had been a little disappointed. It seemed to her that no one appreciated him. The girls preferred younger and more common-place men—the matrons knew that he was not a marrying man, and discountenanced any *penchant* their daughters might have for him. The men, in general, either believed that there never had been anything the matter with him, or thought that if he were liable to sudden attacks of insanity, his brother should not let him go about in society. But he was admired for his noble character. There was a small minority, both male and female, who felt attracted to-

wards Arundel Raby, and watched him with intense interest—as one who led a life apart and unknown to the rest of the world.

Some of these last were present at the Opera that night. They had noticed the intimacy, the perfect confidence, that seemed to subsist between Mr. Raby and this lady who was with Lady Carleton.

“Who was she? How long had she been known to her?”—“Was he in love with her?”—“She was a charming woman. What fine eyes—and what a voice!”

“Oh, but there can be no love in the case,” said some one in Lady Sarah B——’s box.

“Still there is some strong bond between them.”

“Yes. She is the only person that can manage him when he is out of his mind, they say. You remember the story of Charles the Well Beloved and the young girl they called the Lily of Paris?”

“Yes, yes!—a very touching and beautiful story.”

“Well, this is similar. Is it not so, Mr. Morton? I am so glad you have come. You are poor Mr. Raby’s uncle, and ought to know.”

“My dear Lady Sarah, your imagination has painted the truth fairer in many ways than it is. That lady,”—glancing across the house at Margaret Hastings, and unconscious that Arundel Raby was alone in the next box, leaning against the partition, and could hear every word that the animated party uttered—“that lady does nurse my nephew when he is ill. You may observe that she has strong, powerful, magnetic eyes, such as subdue the insane. She is a hanger-on of the family—she makes herself a favourite with them. But,” he added with a sneer, “she can never attain her end, for Arundel will never marry her.”

“What! do you suppose she is in love with him?” asked the pitying Lady Sarah.

“I *know* she is. But he, poor fellow, with the perversity of man, will have nothing to say to her; he cherishes the memory of a woman who cared no more for him than you do.”

"Poor Miss Hastings! He does not know of her love?" asked the lady.

"He has no suspicion of it, I believe, when he is well. In his insane fits no one knows what happens, for he is shut up with his servants and Miss Hastings. Probably he loves her as much as she can desire, then."

"How can you insinuate such shocking slanders! She looks so true and good."

"You will confess that she does not look like a woman whose love has been blighted. Look at her *embonpoint*—at her calm smile. Do you read constant love unrequited in that woman's manner? If it be so, I shall cry henceforth, *Vive le désespoir!*"

"You are a sad calumniator."

"I am a teller of sad truths. Now for the second act."

Mr. Raby sat alone for some time longer, watching Margaret and the stage. When the opera was over, he did not come to lead his sister-in-law and Margaret to the carriage. Lord Carleton performed that duty, and accompanied them home, where there was to be a *petit souper* for a select company.

"What has happened to Arundel?" asked Lord Carleton of Margaret in a hurried whisper, as they went up-stairs behind the countess. "He has disappeared in a strange mood."

"I saw him go away with Mr. Morton."

Margaret tried to keep up an appearance of interest in all that went on during that night's festivity; but her heart was listening for Arundel's return. Presently she was quieted by a slip of paper which Lord Carleton put into her hand. She contrived to read it unobserved. It was from Arundel, and contained these words:

"Come to me in the vine-room before you go to bed.

"Yours,

"ARUNDEL."

Margaret stayed with Lord and Lady Carleton until the

last guest had departed; then she wished them both good night, and retired to her own room. It was only for a few minutes, to repose, and—for she was every inch a woman—to set her “poetic head-dress” in order, before she met the eyes of the only man whom she cared to charm. She smiled as she glanced at the reflexion of herself in the glass.

“Certainly, dress is a sort of magic. I wonder whether I seem as much improved to other people as I do to myself?” But she did not linger. She walked quickly, buoyantly towards the vine-room. As soon as she reached the door, she stopped. One of those sudden presentiments, which come we know not how or why to warn us that some change, some crisis of our life, is at hand, came over her. It was too distinct and overwhelming to be put aside with a “*Pooh! pooh! this is nonsense!*” She knew that it was not nonsense, that it belonged to the many things, earthly or heavenly, which are not dreamed of in our philosophies; and she respected it accordingly. She gathered up all her courage to meet the approaching trial, laid her hand on the lock, and opened the door. Even then the wonderful beauty of the room made its usual impression on her mind; she saw distinctly, in the soft lamplight, the luxuriant foliage and the dusky grapes waving on high, though her eyes rested on the figure of Arundel Raby, as he stood with his back to her, searching in a cabinet. One look at the erect, intelligent form, confirmed her opinion that he was in no danger of falling ill. Presently he turned round, and almost started as he perceived her. She looked anxious and pale.

“You wished to see me. I trust—— What is it, Arundel?” And she sat down on the nearest chair. “Is there something wrong?”

He sat beside her, and tried to reassure her by his looks. He took her hand, and kissed it. The combat within her was but short. She forced her pulse to calmness, and said in her voice of gentlest friendship: “I understand! You will want my care soon. I had not observed a change in you. I have been occupied with trifles. Forgive me, dear friend!” Then

she bent her head to conceal her tears, and murmured: "God's will be done."

"Now and always," he replied in the same tone, watching her intently. "Only let us be careful that we read His will aright. St. Simeon Stylites and many thousand others mistook the will of that God, whose name is love—who pitieth us as a father pitieth his own children. Can He take pleasure in undue sacrifices?"

"Men are not wont to offer them," she replied.

"But women are, Margaret."

"Men have nothing to do but to accept them graciously," she rejoined, looking up with a half smile. "I thought we had disposed of that little matter long ago, Arundel. Once more, then, let me assure you that I sacrifice nothing in tending you throughout the dark days of your life. I am well-nigh alone and useless else! Did not your sweet mother give me that sister's privilege on her death-bed? While I live I will not forsake you in your illness. Tell me now what you feel—what you fear for yourself. Does François know? You must see Dr. Wynn to-morrow—and the next day we are to go to Carleton. Will you go with us, or follow?" She spoke with forced calmness.

He seemed not to be thinking of her words, though he watched her face. "We will speak of those things another time," he said. "Listen to me now—you are so good, so considerate, that I will be plain with you. I have this night discovered a truth about myself that has been hidden from my consciousness since early childhood. I love *you*, Margaret, more than all things but God and my duty. Nay; do not rise. I will not offend you with the history of a love so unfair to you, so unfortunate for me—for I can never ask you to be my wife;—no, not even if you gave me reason to think you loved me as I love you. You look as if my brain were disordered now! Ah, believe me, no man is saner than I am now. All the past rises clearly before me—my wild, strong passion for Geraldine Trevor. How natural! how true to the hot blood and caprice of youth *that was*! Yes, I loved her

vehemently, passionately ;—not as I love, and ever have loved, and must love you, my own Margaret! my pearl of pearls! Even throughout that long fever of the soul, when the brilliant, beautiful Geraldine tortured me with her sisterly kindness, you were ever my most loved companion—the shelter, the repose, the home of the heart. You were like fresh air and daylight,—a blessing so great and all-pervading that the dull recipient heeded it not. And like the sunlight and the breeze, you cared not that your goodness was thrown away ;—sufficient to you was it to be good. Margaret, a veil has been gradually removed from the past. A trifling accident has this night made me understand myself and what you have been to me. And I know now that my love for you is the true, enduring—first—*last* love of my life! Why send for you to-night to tell you this? you will ask. It is useless.”

“Oh, no, no!” she murmured. “It was well done! If indeed you——” She stopped.

“I judged so when I resolved to see and speak with you this night. Life for all, for me especially, is uncertain. Tomorrow I go abroad for an important affair. The next day you go to Carleton, whither I intend to follow soon—but who can secure the fulfilment of his intention? Besides (though I have no anticipation of it now), I may be stricken any day; may be cut off from communication with all whom I love in this life. I know it is not much—that it is poor indeed for your deserts—but still I longed to lay the homage of my love before you now, while I have the power. I ask nothing in return, Margaret.”

It was no dream of hers—no wild illusion of his brain. In the prime of their life—when the first youth was gone, he had said he loved her! Was it too late? Ah! love comes never too late to the loving! Quicker than an electric shock these thoughts passed through her mind. Then she laid her burning hand on the beloved head bent low before her, and said,

“Arundel! you know my heart *now*—I feel that you do. It is that knowledge which prompts you, delicate, generous as you are, to speak thus. There was no need! I shall go on to



the end of life, please God, as I have hitherto lived—your most affectionate and devoted friend. No more! I would not have you forget, even if you could forget, Lady Geraldine; sweet as even your *compassion* for me is!”

“Compassion!” he exclaimed, starting up. “Then there was some truth in their insinuations (blessings on them!), and you have long felt for me more than a sister’s love? Oh, speak, Margaret.”

She rose too, and stood upright before him, as she said:

“Arundel Raby, I am no boaster; but when you ask me if I have not felt more than a sister’s love for you, I must reply. More than a sister’s, mother’s, wife’s love have I felt for you ever since I knew what love meant! And in the name of that love which is greater than that of wife, mother, or sister, I solemnly swear that not even your wish would make me other to you than I am. Wife and child are denied you by the voice of God in your own conscience; and my conscience says ‘Amen’ to that denial. We have read God’s will aright there!”

“Have we indeed? How know you *that*, Margaret?” he cried, eagerly. “Is it not some false idea of duty? Has not God made us for enjoyment? You especially?”

“I cannot talk to you calmly now. What you have said has moved me too much. Thank God you are not ill! Let me go now.”

“Not without a blessing, Margaret!” And he opened his arms with a look of fond love. She did not try to resist the impulse which threw her into them. They remained in a long, silent embrace: until, as if in reply to Arundel’s kisses, she tore herself away, and said, “Lord, not as we will but as Thou wilt!” At those words he withdrew his arms from her, and stood pale and motionless.

She left the room quickly, not trusting herself to look back. Oh, if Mr. Morton had known the brief ecstasy he had caused! Ecstasy to be followed by calm, glad years of love! His nephew returned alone that night, on foot, to Sunny Bank, and forgot the morrow

Margaret almost fled to her own room, so eager was her desire to be alone. She sat down to analyse, to understand, the whole scope of the truth—if truth it were that Arundel had declared to her. He loved her! that was all she understood at first. Words, looks, and that last embrace (“Which, alas! must be *the last*,” as she said to herself), his whole behaviour gave her assurance that he *did* love her. How had it come about? Was it, as he said, that he had always loved her? That the passion for Lady Geraldine was the illusion of youth—the fiery outburst of transitory feelings; but that his love for her was part of his being, and so had been unconscious until now? And what had made him conscious of it now? He had spoken of “insinuations” about her love for him. Who had uttered them? Who knew of her love for him? She paused here, for she remembered that she had taken no great pains to conceal her love from those who had any interest in discovering it. James, and William Grey, and, perhaps, François—they guessed or knew. But they would not have told Arundel. What did it matter how he had discovered it? If it had really been the means of awakening love in him, she, too, would say, “Blessings on those insinuations! For he *does* love. That I feel is true. It was not *compassion* which moved him, just now. It was love—genuine, unmistakable love! Ah! to be loved by him!—What joy!” She paced the room awhile as if she trod on air. Then pausing before the glass, the sight of herself gave a turn to her feelings. They were quickly modulated into another key—a pathetic minor key, which is familiar to the heartstrings of most men and women who have passed the age of thirty.

“And this is another reality of life! Love has come to me at last. The love of the only man I could take as a husband. But how has it come? Is it like what I dreamed? Nay; it is shorn of all its honourable brightness. He has loved another—fairer, worthier; he could not win her, and now he contents himself with me. I have grown used to his friendship, and can do without his love. It will not steep me in ecstasy as it would have done ten years ago. It has come too

late. Like every good thing we set our hearts on inordinately, God withholds it for ever, or until we have learned to dispense with it."

But she lay down to sleep that night, for all her middle-aged meditations, with an illimitable joy in her heart, as if she had been a young girl. The words, "I love you, my Margaret!" were sung in her dreams all night, and the voice that sang them was Rubini's.

She awoke the next morning with a distinct sense of happiness—some new and glorious addition to her life. "Arun-del loves me."

Then she began to think that some great outward change, consequent upon this inward change, would take place. She dreaded change, like all persons of a steadfast mind. But upon looking further into the matter, it seemed clear to her that there need be no outward change. "Our love is exceptional; we have no one to render account to except each other. We cannot marry. I shall live as I have done before, expect in the sweet inward happiness of knowing myself beloved." She arose, too happy to be very gay, and thinking "He will come soon this morning," began dressing herself. When she rang for her little maid, Susan appeared with a letter in her hand.

"If you please, ma'am, the French gentleman who lives with Mr. Raby has brought this letter, and wishes to see you."

"Say I will come presently. I will ring again when I want you."

Margaret opened the letter deliberately, though she was eager to devour the contents:

"MY OWN MARGARET,—For you are now my own—you have told me so—and I felt the sweet truth circling like new life in my veins! My own Margaret, how is it that I have walked so many years close by the river of love, for which my soul thirsted, and knew it not? I am amazed at my own want of self-knowledge. Whenever I was away from you my heart beat coldly—life was only a series of duties—hard to be

performed. Whenever I was near you I was well and happy—and all life's duties had a charm. I always knew that Margaret Hastings was the cause of my best hopes and feelings—that she was my sun in the day and my moon in the night—time of the divided life that God has given me. And yet I did not know that I loved her!—And therefore could not be blessed with the hope that she might love me. Ah, Margaret! in all things you are healthful and good. You love because it is your nature to do so—as the trees blossom and the brook murmurs—not because you think or hope for a return. It is more blessed to give than to receive—and you are fashioned after God's own heart.

“All this night I have lived over our lives again, yours and mine, Margaret; from the day I remember so well, when you, a four-years-old darling, ran away from home to see ‘little Dunny.’ That day's adventure was typical of our lives, Margaret. You have ministered to me in all my misfortunes, at every cost and peril to yourself. I have accepted all—gratefully!—oh, yes, most gratefully and lovingly; but I have been blind to the treasure that might have been mine. Then I have left you whenever I could take part in the world's work; left you when in health—you who would never have left me (I now suspect) in sickness or in health! Will you accept this late acknowledgment of the long arrears of care and love I owe you? Will you let me pay them, as much of them as can be paid in this world, by such a one as I? Hereafter I may have more in my power *than has* been given to me here!

“I shall not see you for several months. I knew this last night, or I would not have spoken. I have promised the Government my services on a secret mission to —. They have appointed my departure from Dover to-morrow afternoon. I shall be on my road thither when you read this. I cannot say how long I shall be away. When I return, it will be to begin a new life with you—at Carleton, or elsewhere; but we must be *together*. I can write no more now.

“Your own ARUNDEL.

“François will undertake to send letters quickly to me. Speak to him.”

## CHAPTER XI.

MR. MORTON AND MARGARET.

"A time to keep silence and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate."  
*Ecclesiastes.*

"MARGARET, had you any suspicion of Arundel's intended departure when he was with us last night? I believe you know all his secrets," said the countess, when Margaret came to luncheon. She had not left her room before, having been much occupied with letter-writing, she said. The earl was present, and Mr. Morton.

"I can answer for her," said the earl. "She knew nothing of it. Arundel's word was pledged not to mention the matter to any one."

"Then how does Miss Hastings know it now?" inquired Mr. Morton. "For you take for granted that she does know."

"Oh, François de Merville has been here this morning," said the countess. "He came with a letter from Arundel to Miss Hastings, I was told. I hope Arundel will not be absent long," she continued, "for I had counted upon having him with us at Carleton. Did not you, Frank?"

"Not positively, my dear; because I knew there had been some talk of sending him to negotiate this affair at ——. He and the Grand Duke were very great friends, you know, when Arundel ran wild in Germany, many years ago. He is the best person they could have selected for the purpose. I do not think he will be away long."

"I am very glad to hear it," said his wife. "He leaves a blank when he goes away that no one else can fill up."

The earl looked pleased at this praise of his brother. Margaret remained silent; and Mr. Morton began to speak of some public matters.

When they had finished luncheon, Lady Carleton told Margaret that she was going out with her husband for a couple of hours, after which time she should expect to find her ready for a drive. Mr. Morton said he would stay to write a letter.

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Margaret was about to leave the room as soon as Lord and Lady Carleton had left it, when Mr. Morton spoke to her :

"Miss Hastings, I shall be obliged if you will give me ten minutes' conversation—on a subject that concerns you intimately."

She turned, and sat down at the table opposite to him, without speaking.

"You had an interview with my nephew, Mr. Raby, last night?"

She bowed.

"He told you, then, of the dispute which had taken place between himself and me concerning some remarks he had overheard in the Opera House last night, of which *you* were the subject?"

"He spoke only of 'insinuations.' Nor did he mention your name in connexion with them," replied Margaret.

"My nephew has a good deal of the fire of youth about him still, Miss Hastings. He was quite chivalrous in your cause last night. Probably he endeavoured to compensate you afterwards for the *slander* which he was mad enough to perceive in my words. There was none intended. I spoke only what you and I know to be the truth, concerning your uncommon attachment to him and his family."

He fixed his eyes on Margaret's face, and she looked steadily at him, but she spoke no word in reply. Somewhat disconcerted by her silence, he went on :

"Now, I think it well that we should understand one another, Miss Hastings. You and I are, and always have been, enemies." She bowed acquiescence. "But we may come to an understanding concerning matters which interest us both so much—the conduct and health of my nephew, Arundel Raby. In case of the demise of his brother, I am his legal guardian."

"If he require one!" interrupted Margaret.

"Ah! it is, of course, proper for *you* to maintain that he does not."

"And it is to your interest to maintain that he does."

"How so? It is a troublesome office—the guardianship of a lunatic."

"Not to you, Mr. Morton! Do you think I am not aware that you are heir-at-law to the property of the man you wish to prove a lunatic?"

He looked surprised for a moment, and then replied :

"If you *do* know that the North Ashurst estates become mine in case of Arundel's death without a legitimate heir, it is only a further proof that my opinion of you is correct. You have some strong motive for making yourself mistress of *all* his affairs."

"I have. Can you not guess what it is?"

"You hope to become his wife. It is useless to deny it! I know that you love—have long loved him. It is even probable that what he told me last night is true—that he has long loved you, and has been gradually made aware of the nature of his feelings since you came to town."

Margaret, in spite of her determination to be thoroughly on her guard with Mr. Morton, could not help blushing with pleasure at these last words. He observed it, and went on thus :

"He will, perhaps, seek to marry you. I warn you that I will not permit that marriage!"

"You will not permit?" And Margaret's look and tone showed the hatred and scorn she felt. "I do not think it likely your permission would be asked in such a matter. You had better wait until it is."

"I prefer warning you," he replied. "Listen to me awhile longer, and I may be able to show you how easily I could prove that Arundel Raby's marriage with yourself would be illegal. Waving the question of your designs on his property—(though you and your brother have taken no pains to conceal your personal interest in all that concerns North Ashurst)—I must touch upon a more delicate affair—your strange passion for himself."

Margaret rose. "Excuse me, Mr. Morton, I have listened to your offensive remarks long enough! I will hear no more."

"I must detain you a moment. Do you remember the night on which Lady Geraldine Trevor died, and all that passed between you and Arundel Raby in the oak parlour at midnight? Ah! I see you have a good memory. I happened, no matter by what chance, to be concealed in that room, and saw and heard all. If need were, I can swear to the cajoling arts I saw you practise to rouse the passions of a young man then on the eve of recovery from a fit of insanity. I can swear that you have by these arts obtained such influence over him, as to prevent his ever being a free agent where you are concerned. I certainly cannot swear to the connexion which exists between you and Mr. Raby during the seasons of his illness, but I heard enough that night to imagine it. His physician and his personal attendants are all friends of yours; and they know very well to what they lend themselves. Are you satisfied, Miss Hastings, that you do not deceive me?"

She turned slowly towards him, and spoke these words:

"I am satisfied now that my instinct to distrust—to hate you was a right instinct. You are a bad man! You believe only in evil."

"We will not dispute about words. I am a clear-sighted man: when I find it suits my purpose, I am a plain-spoken man. Hear me further."

"Sir, I have long been aware of all that is in your power against my unfortunate friend. Of the depth of your ill-will towards myself you have now informed me fully. It will in nowise alter my conduct. Your menaces cannot affect the connexion which subsists between your nephew and myself. We know you! Lord Carleton does not suspect how much it is to your interest to disturb his domestic peace. Nay, nay! you shall hear me now. If Lord Carleton and his brother die without children, you are the nearest heir to the Carleton estates. But the breach you effected between Frank and Alice the day before their marriage has been repaired since I came to town. She will, I trust, be a happy mother this summer!—ere she dies, the mother of *many* children. From out their number an heir to North Ashurst may be selected. You know



that Arundel can leave his property to whomsoever he chooses, provided his nearest kin testify that he is of sound mind when he makes his will. Rest assured that he will not wait until you are his nearest kin to adopt an heir. He cares too much for the welfare of North Ashurst to leave you any chance of becoming master there. I think it best to deal with you as I deal with every one else—directly and truthfully. Henceforth I am prepared for calumny from you; and you are prepared for an endeavour on my part to open Lord Carleton's eyes as to the real character of your advice to him on all family matters."

"Miss Hastings!" he exclaimed, furiously, "you go too far. You, a poor dependent on the Raby family—a woman who has lost character by her disregard of all decorum—whose own family are ashamed of her undisguised connexion with a young nobleman who is scarcely a responsible person,—you, to presume to threaten me! Beware that I do not disturb the security of your residence at Carleton. I have only to open the eyes of Lord and Lady Carleton to the improper—the immoral—nature of your attachment to Mr. Raby. He is not to blame, poor afflicted creature!"

"Try your worst, Mr. Morton. I abide the result."

With these words Margaret left the room. Mr. Morton was enraged to find that his antagonist was of so brave a spirit. He had expected to frighten her by threatening the security of her position in the Carleton household, if he revealed what he had overheard on the night of Lady Geraldine's death. He had not the remotest conception that her love was, in any respect, different from the love of ordinary women for ordinary men. A passion which contented itself with warming the inner life, and, upon principle, abstained from giving the senses the least dominion—this was a love he would have laughed at as the silliest Platonism. In the case of Margaret and Arundel, by circumstances thrown into daily communion of the most intimate nature, he did not believe that any such Platonism could exist. He did not believe it then; he laughed at those who endeavoured afterwards to

convince him that Arundel had resolved to be childless, because he thought it wrong to risk the continuance of a race liable to the curse of his disease. Therefore it is no wonder that when Arundel adopted a nephew of my aunt's, Mr. Morton declared openly his conviction (for it was his conviction) that the child was his own son by his designing mistress and nurse—Margaret Hastings.

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After Margaret's conversation with Mr. Morton, she felt the necessity of doing something to frustrate his designs against her. Margaret was constitutionally brave; her courage rose with the occasion. It is true she shed "some natural tears" after the little scene with Mr. Morton; women are wont to do so after strong excitement, whether painful or pleasurable; but she wiped them soon, and sat down in her own apartment to reflect on her exact position, and to decide on what was necessary to be done. After a quarter of an hour she rang for her little maid, entrusted her with a note, and bade her watch for Lord Carleton's return, and not allow him to go away again until she had delivered the note into his hands. She then dressed herself, and was prepared to go out with her ladyship, who had many farewell calls to pay; her resolution to retire to Carleton Castle on the morrow remaining fixed. Margaret determined not to think of all that concerned herself any more while she was in London; but gave herself up entirely to the bustle and excitement of Lady Carleton's life during that day and night. In the meantime, her note to Lord Carleton had done some good. It ran as follows:

"MY DEAR LORD CARLETON,—You are perhaps aware that my connexion with your family exposes me to ill-will and to misinterpretation. I am now, as always, disposed to brave both in the maintenance of that connexion, provided you and your lady are prepared to give me your countenance against calumnious attacks. Mr. Morton will try to make you believe that I am not what you suppose me to be. Will you suspend your judgment in this matter until your brother's return?

He can satisfy you as to the truth of anything Mr. Morton may tell you about

"Your old friend,

"MARGARET HASTINGS."

After reading this note, Lord Carleton made up his mind to refuse credence to anything Mr. Morton might advance against Miss Hastings without substantial proof. And it was well for her he did so, for Mr. Morton dined with him at the club that day, in order to discuss some business connected with the Carleton property; and when that was finished, he opened his battery of slander against Margaret. Lord Carleton listened till it was exhausted, and then told Mr. Morton that he was sorry that he had formed so false an estimate of Miss Hastings' character. "I have known her from childhood, and she is incapable of any one of the vices you attribute to her."

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Late in the evening of the next day Margaret Hastings was walking to and fro on the terrace at Carleton Castle with its lord and lady. She lingered behind that she might be no impediment to their low talk, many sweet tones of which, however, she could not avoid catching. They harmonised with her own thoughts. Lord Carleton was of opinion that Arundel would not be away more than three months. "I can bear that easily," she said to herself, "*now* that all things are so different with me! I shall never again have the dull, dreary years of loneliness in this great house! He will be with me when he is himself. When he is not,—when the dread spirit seizes him, and feeling bursts forth uncontrolled by reason or a sense of right,—when, perhaps, he will not recognise me,—he will still be with me; and I shall be stronger than ever to bear his affliction and my own."

"What are you thinking of, Margaret?" inquired the countess, stopping suddenly, and turning upon her a face so radiant with happiness that Margaret was almost startled.

"What are you thinking of Margaret? We have asked you twice a most important question. Shall the eighth Earl of Carleton bear the name of Frederick or Francis? We cannot agree."

"Would it not be wiser to wait until we are sure of a baby Lord Merle?—You may have a lovely little lady instead."

"That is the way in which she always damps my hopes, Frank!"

"She is a very prudent woman, my dear, and wishes to prepare us for disappointment. Take my advice, and do not heed her prudential warning. Make up your mind to have a son, in spite of her caution."

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE LAST OF THE BABYS.

"Only the best composed and worthiest hearts  
God sets to act the hard'st and constant'st parts."

DANIEL.

THE summer had come and gone over the grey towers of Carleton and the silent greenery of its woods and glades. That summer had brought a child to its owners—a fair, sound, healthy babe; but Margaret's warning had bewitched it, the mother said, "and so it was a girl." After the earl's first feeling of disappointment in its sex, he showed as much pleasure in the birth of his eldest child as most fathers, and took as much delight in watching its feeble struggles to live, move, and have a being. The countess, of course, thought her little girl perfect, and could not say, "'twas a pity it was not a boy."

The little Lady Alice throve as well as if she had been a peasant's child. Margaret Hastings was head-nurse until the fair mother was able to move about, when she assumed the office herself awhile, until the infant began to require so much manual labour as made its mother glad to convert the professional nurse's office (hitherto a sinecure) into an active one. The year had rolled on, rich with happiness for the countess, now a beloved wife and mother: nor less happy had it been for her husband, in whose heart the youthful passion for the

lovely Alice Trevor, smothered for several years after marriage, now burned with a steady flame. This year, too, had made him a father, though it had not given him an heir.

"But," as he wrote to his brother, "Rome was not built in a day; nor can I expect that the whole of my happy fortune will be. This year my Alice is safely a mother—another year she may be the mother of an heir. All in good time! I am rather sorry you think of spending the autumn and winter at Carleton, because we are going away in a few weeks. Alice requires sea air. However, you will be with us for a short time now, and I shall have the pleasure of introducing your niece. I can go with you to North Ashurst whenever you like.

"Morton has been here. He has mentioned privately to me some reports concerning Miss Hastings, which you and I must endeavour to silence. He believes them himself; but he is ready to believe anything against Margaret. I have not spoken to her on the matter, though I have reason to think she has heard these reports, and is naturally pained by them."

I will not attempt to describe Margaret's feelings as the day drew near when Arundel would return. If any young lady of eighteen, who may chance to read her history, supposes that my aunt was too old to feel any of those tremors which she herself feels when she is expecting the return of a lover—for the first time, too, since he became a lover—I can securely assert that she is mistaken. Perhaps, the said young lady, when she is as old as my aunt was then, may be inclined to think that Margaret Hastings felt more deeply than any girl of eighteen could feel. Her love, be it remembered, had grown with her growth and strengthened with her strength. It was a love which had withstood time, absence, and indifference; it was a love that would have gone on to the end of life without return, for it was excited by no transitory graces, no ephemeral or mere earthly qualities in its object. She loved Arundel Raby because he was the best, most nobly gifted human being she had ever known—and because he was the most afflicted, and it had been permitted to her to minister

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to him in his affliction. Besides (and it may not be needless to impart this truth to ladies under twenty), women between thirty and forty are often more capable of feeling and inspiring love than if they were fifteen years younger. If a woman is old then, it is generally her own fault—she has not taken care of the best part of herself.

But my aunt's *unrequited* love (which kind, Schiller says, is the only pure love) was unrequited no longer. During his absence the whole summer had been made glorious to Margaret by the regular receipt of letters from Arundel. Such letters! I cannot boast that I have ever seen them—no one ever will—but I know that they exist in a certain drawer of a cabinet in my aunt's parlour, the key of which she wears suspended by a ribbon round her neck. I have promised to burn these letters without reading them when my aunt is laid in Carleton churchyard. They came, two in each week, all through the summer of his diplomatic visit to the court of —, and Margaret questioned whether she had ever felt the full beauty of Carleton in the summer-time before. And now October was begun,—and

“Autumn bold,  
With universal tinge of sober gold,”

had once more coloured the woods of the park. The day of Arundel's return arrived. He was not expected till after dinner, but he reached the castle while that meal was in progress, and went at once to his own apartments, giving orders that no one should announce his arrival. There was no guest with the earl that day but Mr. Grey (now back again at the Rectory), and the only ladies were, as usual, the countess and Miss Hastings. The latter had complained of cold that she might have an excuse for wearing a certain green velvet gown which had been remodelled lately, and which attracted the critical countess's attention.

“Is that the very same gown, Margaret? How well you have kept it! And how successfully it has been altered! I don't think you ever had a more becoming dress. You grow handsomer, too, every day. Does she not, Mr. Grey?”

Mr. Grey had not grown witty as he grew older, but he had learned to conceal his feelings. He observed, that

"Miss Hastings did not seem to change to his eye. As to velvet gowns—he thought them becoming to every woman;—much more so than gauzes and such butterfly frippery."

After dinner the ladies retired, as usual, to the oak parlour, and thence into the conservatory. Here the nurse brought her charge to be kissed and dandled before going to bed. The gentlemen followed very soon, and coffee was served as they all sat near the fountain; all but Margaret, who had the baby in her arms, and was walking to and fro among the flowers. By some chance she raised her eyes to the top of the staircase communicating with Arundel's apartment, and saw him looking down thence upon her. In that moment they saw only each other. Presently, Margaret turned away her too happy eyes, and bent over the infant; and the voice of the nurse sounded like a voice in a dream.

"If you please, ma'am, I must take baby now. It is late."

"Yes, my dear Margaret," said the countess. "What are you thinking of? I thought the little creature was gone. She must go immediately!"

"Not till she has been presented to her unele!" cried a voice from above.

"You. How came you there, Arundel?" cried his brother, starting from his seat.

"Very easily," he replied, coming quickly down the steps. "I have been in the house more than an hour. I have had something to eat, and am now ready to face any number of friends."

Every one greeted him affectionately; but the meeting between him and his brother was too full of feeling for words. The earl looking earnestly into his brother's eyes, read there the glad assurance that all was well with him in heart and brain. Then came the proud moment for the young parents when their child was put into Arundel's arms by Margaret; and he examined the little face attentively, and found in it a likeness to its father. The group beside the fountain at that

moment was worthy a painter's study, as the setting sunlight streamed upon them all. The beautiful countess, reclining upon a couch in front of the falling water, was eagerly watching Arundel's scrutiny of her child. He and his brother stood close to the couch—both figures alike, and yet so distinct and different in dignity and grace.

"They make a pretty picture!" said Mr. Grey, in a whisper. "I have seen a few handsome people in my time, but I never saw three so beautiful as the countess and those two brothers. Mr. Raby looks perfectly well; but James writes me word that his lordship will not be able to visit North Ashurst this year. Is he going away with his brother?"

"No," replied Margaret; "he intends to remain here."

"And you?" inquired Mr. Grey, looking intently at the fountain.

"I remain here, as usual. I hope I shall see you frequently."

Mr. Grey looked at her; and then, without any *tact*, turned to look at Arundel. He was looking at Margaret.

Mr. Grey blushed, as if he had been caught in some impropriety, and said hurriedly to Margaret, "I think I had better go. I am *de trop* in this family meeting." She went with him towards the oak parlour. He said:

"I wish I could persuade you not to stay here, when—. Well, well! I suppose you have made up your mind?" They entered the oak room, and continued talking.

"I told you I had, many years ago, William Grey. I am only more confirmed in my resolution now. Why speak of this?"

"I was in hopes your late visit to London was the beginning of a new life for you."

"It was only a necessary variety in the old one. I was of more use to the family I love best by going for awhile to London—therefore I went. I grant that the visit was very beneficial to me. I am the happier for it; but I am not wanted there now. I may be wanted for my old-work *here* before long. Do not be deceived by *his* appearance of gaiety and health. If I am not wanted for that sad task, then the



good God has a portion of happiness in store for me—which you will not grudge me, William Grey?”

“Happiness. Then, Margaret, I have read your face aright, lately! I read his aright just now. He loves you! God be praised. It is so sad to love without return. Good night—God bless you, Margaret. Make an apology to them for me.” And, after grasping her hand violently, Mr. Grey stepped out on the terrace and disappeared.

A short time afterwards, when the countess and the two brothers entered the oak parlour, they found Margaret Hastings there alone.

“Where is Grey?” asked the earl. “I want a game of billiards.”

“Mr. Grey felt as if he were intruding into a family party, and begged me to apologise to you for going away without the ceremony of leave-taking.”

“I never saw a dull fellow who was so sharp as Grey where delicacy of feeling is concerned,” said the earl.

“But you clever folks are often mistaken in judging that same quality of dulness,” said Arundel. “Grey is dull where books and words are concerned, but he is dull in nothing else.”

“Oh, if you mean to defend Grey on the score of intellectual brilliancy, I will say nothing. Only when you have lived three months in this place with no other male companion within five miles, I think you will find your present argument untenable.”

“I am sure, Frank,” said the countess, “Mr. Grey is a very quiet, sensible person. So well-bred, amiable, and obliging.”

“So he is, my dear; I am very fond of my old playmate. *‘Il n’a qu’un défaut,—il est insupportable.’* But I forget that he has even that one fault when I am away from Carleton.”

Three weeks longer the earl and countess stayed at the castle. The greatest part of the time the two brothers were out shooting together, or riding to visit distant neighbours; so that the ladies saw but little of them, “and that little,” as the countess remarked, “was not worth seeing.” They were

"too tired to make themselves very agreeable companions."  
"Mr. Grey with his 'one fault,' was worth a dozen such knocked-up geniuses."

On the morning of the day fixed for their departure, with a host of servants, to Brighton—the countess and her friend Margaret sat together, enjoying a last talk in the old oak parlour. Margaret had been reading part of a letter from her brother James, in which my improved health was notified; and the countess had hoped that if she herself were to have a son, it might be just such another as that "Baby Frank." Afterwards they spoke of the joy which an heir would bring to the earl and his brother—of the Raby pride of family—the Raby ambition. The countess, too, had set her heart on having a son. "She could not bear to disappoint Frank," and "she should be so happy to keep that Mr. Morton out of the property." "For Arundel's sake," she hoped "she might have several sons!" To all these things Margaret said "Amen."

"I am tired of this great place, Margaret; but I shall miss your sweet sisterly care and affection. I wish you could be persuaded to change your resolution, and go with us. I cannot comprehend your attachment to this dreary place. It is full of melancholy. I cannot bear to walk along these corridors at dusk,—where poor Geraldine and I used to spend many an hour. I went up to her old room in the turret yesterday, and found the door locked. They told me you kept the key. That is quite right. Perhaps it was as well that I did not go in there. Her bedroom and dressing-room are in perfect order—just as she left them! I go there sometimes. Yesterday I went into the state-room, and was struck by that sweet picture of the late countess and her little ones. If I had two such—No! not quite *such*—but *in appearance*! I have never been into that state-room since the Christmas night when poor Lord Carleton died. It is terribly grand and gloomy! So are most of the rooms. The only one that I really like is this;" and she looked round with admiration on the walls and cabinets. "It is so much improved and altered

that it never reminds me of the first time I saw it. You remember our getting the keys and bursting in here, the day before that Christmas?"

"Ah, this room is much altered since I first saw it!" said Margaret, with a sigh. "I was a child then, and I was frightened by something here. Now, I agree with you, and prefer it to any room in the house. This and the conservatory are pleasant places."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Margaret," replied the countess; "because I have been thinking how I could add a little to the small pleasures of your life."

"Small pleasures!" said Margaret, laughing. "I would have you to know that my pleasures in life are great—though I am not a beauty, and have not a baby, like some people."

"Nevertheless, I should like to think of you in the most cheerful environment Carleton can afford. You asked me the other day to give you a private sitting-room—'a proper housekeeper's room.' I have spoken to Frank and Arundel on the subject, and for more reasons than the one I contemplated, they think my wish to appropriate this room to you is very good."

"My dear Lady Carleton!—the room you fitted up for yourself—the room you like the best. I cannot think of it!"

"But you must think of it, and accept it, too,—for Arundel's sake. Remember, when he is ill you can reach his rooms quickly, without going through any other part of the house—from this room. I shall be very little at Carleton, I foresee. Frank and I love the excitements of the world; and the quiet of this place is not congenial to us. I will share this room with you whenever I am here and Arundel is in the family circle. At all other times I wish you to consider it as your private apartment."

And thus it was that the oak room became nominally, what it had been for years really,—my Aunt Margaret's parlour.

In the afternoon of that day the carriages for the earl and his suite were all drawn up in the great courtyard. The servants filled those appropriated to them, and drove off. The

handsome carriage, with its well-packed imperial and attendants, in proper costume, still waited for the earl and countess, and a small chariot for the nurse and her charge. At length they all appeared at the hall-door, accompanied by Mr. Arundel Raby and Miss Hastings. They lingered still—speaking the more last words that are always to be spoken when there is no more time to speak them. Five o'clock struck by the castle clock, and at that sound the earl said, decidedly—"We must go at once, Alice. We must reach D— by seven o'clock."

"Certainly," she replied. "The child must not be travelling after that time. So, now, good-bye for the last time, Margaret. Good-bye, Arundel! We shall see you, I hope, soon."

The earl then put her into the carriage, and once more taking leave of Miss Hastings and his brother, stepped in after her, and the carriage drove off. It was immediately followed by the one containing the child and nurse; and in five minutes they appeared like two black spots at the farther end of the avenue.

When Arundel looked round for Margaret, she had disappeared. Seeing servants standing about, he turned away, and went to walk on the south terrace. He had walked there half an hour, in deep thought, before he chanced to see Margaret as he was passing the window of the oak parlour. She sat within, reading. He stopped and tapped on the glass. She started; but recovered herself in a moment, and went to open the window.

When he had taken a seat beside her he said:

"I have been longing for this moment—a time when I should be alone with you—ever since I returned from Germany. Three weeks have passed and we have exchanged no word nor look, except in the presence of others. You have avoided me, Margaret."

She smiled a little. "I wished to get used to you in the new relation in which we stand to each other. Besides, I did not wish Frank and Alice to see the change. Moreover, there

has been so much bustle and confusion since you came, that I have not felt in a fit state for confidential talk."

"All valid reasons, Margaret, for maintaining a show of indifference to me for three weeks!—while I have been watching every opportunity to——"

"To find fault with my behaviour," she said, laughing. "Ah, believe me, I did it for the best. There are times when we cannot trust ourselves alone with our happiness."

"Then you have been happy since I came?" he said, taking her hand.

"I never was so happy before. I felt that you loved me—that we understood each other, though we did not speak. Have you not felt thus also?" she asked, looking into his face with undisguised affection.

"I have felt it, my own Margaret! But it did not satisfy me. I desired to be with you, as we are now,—as I trust we may be henceforth for the rest of our lives,—alone, in this dear home of Carleton. Yet, Margaret, there was a thing I had to say before all else. Have you thought well (as I urged you in my letter) of the great sacrifice you make to me? Have you weighed the slanders from others—the dreadful sufferings you may have to endure from the sight of your lover when——"

"No more, no more," she said, putting her hand before his mouth. "I have weighed the cost of what I do, and I find it almost lighter than dust in the balance. Twenty years of thought could not alter the fact that you are dearer to me than all else in life!"

The tears stood in Arundel's eyes, as he watched her animated face. "To think," he said, "that I was so dull, so soulless, as to live for years with this rich flower of love unfolding near me, and not detect its perfume. The poet's words are not all true, in my case:

"'Tis only when they spring to heaven that angels  
Reveal themselves to you; they sit all day  
Beside you, and lie down at night by you,  
Who care not for their presence—muse or sleep—  
And all at once they leave you, and you know them.\*"

---

\* Browning's "Paracelsus."

I have been more fortunate; for now, thank God, I know you, Margaret! Or if I do not know all, you must help me to a clearer knowledge."

"Much knowledge comes by love," she replied. "All my knowledge of you came by love."

"You have not yet told me that Mr. Morton has insulted, maligned, and tried to intimidate you."

"I did not intend to tell any one of that. I am, fortunately, courageous; and a man like that does not frighten me."

"No; you frightened him, I find. You have made him believe that you are not only a very brave woman, but one who is quite a match for him in worldliness."

"How do you know this?"

"Because I felt sure he would attack you as soon as I was gone; and I acted on that conviction, and taxed him with having done so as soon as I returned. You gave him no promise that we should not marry?"

"Certainly not," she said. "It did not concern him. At all events, I was determined, if it did concern him, I would not ease his mind."

Arundel smiled. "I cannot blame you. However, he was my mother's brother—will be my legal guardian if I survive my brother; there is nothing to be gained by concealing our intentions, and it may do him good to know them. I told him my unalterable resolution with regard to marriage for myself—and your thorough concurrence with it, and power of maintaining us both in that resolution, when we are beset by temptations to waver. I made him feel sure that we shall never marry—though we love each other heartily. When he was convinced of that, I destroyed his hopes of inheriting North Ashurst, by informing him of my intention to choose and adopt a boy,—probably a nephew,—as my heir. He knows that, while Frank lives, I can make that child's claim so secure that no heir-at-law can set it aside."

"How did he receive this?"

"He looked blank enough. He had thought only of my having legitimate children, whom it would be to his interest

to prove illegitimate, and so get possession of the property. He was not prepared for my renunciation of wedlock and domestic joys ; nor for my adoption of a child whose inheritance would be secured by my brother's testimony, and that of other competent persons."

"The countess says she hopes to have several boys, if it be only to keep Mr. Morton out of the property. But if she should have none?"

"We must look for a healthy, well-nurtured child elsewhere. He will, with God's blessing, be as a son to us both, Margaret. In our declining years, there will be a fresh source of joy to us both."

"Will you,—supposing the child you adopt be a stranger, and not your nephew,—will you make him bear your family name?"

"No, Margaret ; I shall then be the last of the Rabys. The old name had better die. It stands for something that has passed out of existence. It was a sound, strong race in the olden time, formed to rule its own, and teach gentle and simple how to live. If nobility obliges a man to do anything—it obliges *me* to sacrifice my individual feelings and affections for the good of the community—and to accept the sacrifice—(for it is one, though *you* say it is not!)—which you make to me. Is it not well that I should be the last of the Rabys, Margaret, wife of my soul?"

And from that time forward they never wavered ; but loved each other ever more and more. There was a chastened affection, a calm intensity of love between them, that I have never seen in any married pair. They were happier, too, than most, especially after seven years, when Lady Carleton having no son, Mr. Raby adopted me as his heir, and strove to make me worthy to hold and wield power.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have yet to show the world that Frank Hastings is not merely a very fortunate young man. As yet I have done little, except under Mr. Raby's direction ; but I shall devote

my life to the task which he believes I can perform. I will not flinch from trouble, pain, or evil report, but will work right on, with all the help I can get, to make North Ashurst and its environs the abode of industrious, intelligent, happy human beings. My father's name and memory will help me, and the upward tendency of the social system in England will be in my favour. If all proprietors throughout the land were animated by Arundel Raby's noble benevolence, *there would be an England to live in.*

Having told the story of my aunt and my adopted father, that others may love and honour them as I do, I will lay down my pen. My pleasant holiday work is ended. I must be in London at the opening of Parliament, for I am Member for North Ashurst. To-day is Mr. Raby's sixtieth birthday. It has been celebrated by the presence of the Earl and Countess of Carleton, with their two daughters, both now married. We have had Mr. Grey, the bachelor rector, and my two brothers. Mr. Raby has had no attack of insanity for five years. He thinks he may never have another.

Last year Mr. Morton died, childless, and there is no fear that I shall ever be disturbed in the great inheritance to which, if I live long enough, I shall succeed.

What more can I say of my Aunt Margaret that shall convey to the reader the charm of her presence—the freshness of heart and mind which she possesses at fifty-seven?—When she sits beside Mr. Raby, and listens to his conversation with me, I often think that no wife and mother can be more complete in all womanly endowments, than this old maiden lady.

The lapse of the earldom of Carleton has somewhat soured the old age of the present earl; but Mr. Arundel Raby has become reconciled to it. “The wealth of the Rabys will enrich other houses, and there will be no more of our race,” he said awhile since to me. “God’s will be done! For His purposes we were raised, and for His purposes we are brought to nought. I look to you, my boy, to found a new race—better fitted for these later times than our old one. You had a good



and noble father. Go forth into the world's fight, imitate him, and take for your motto, '*Fais ce que dois advienne que pourra.*' May the House of Hastings excel in all honourable things the House of Raby; then will its last son have succeeded in converting the evil of his own lot into a blessing for the rest of the world."

THE END.

APRIL, 1874.

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